Popular Politics in Bristol, Somerset and Wiltshire, 1791-1805

by

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A thesis submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Ph.D in the Faculty of Arts, Department of Social and Economic History, September 1992.

Abstract

This thesis examines popular politics within a largely neglected region of England during the period following the French revolution. It seeks to broaden orthodox debates about the loyalist defeat of radicalism by questioning the ideological presumptions upon which definitions of those factions have largely been built, and by considering areas of social conflict beyond the conventionally 'political'.

Ideological consensus in the 1790s, the thesis argues, was expressed not in Reevesism but in abstract constitutional qualities which were equally integral to radicalism. Social cohesion should not therefore be represented as a cypher for Pittite hegemony and deference, but as a complex package of beliefs which both supported and contradicted the values and actions of Reevesism.

Chapter one reviews the historiographical debate over the 1790s and examines the geographic, social/economic and historical background of the present study. Chapter two traces the development of radical politics in the region and questions the reliability of past assessments of radical weakness. Chapter three is a critical reappraisal of Reevesite loyalism, its claim upon the mechanism of 'social cohesion', and the methods by which it exerted influence. In chapter four, the language of both radicalism and loyalism is studied, with particular reference to the legacy of abolitionism, constitutionalism and the 'crime' of innovation. Chapters five, six, seven and eight discuss further aspects of social conflict in the light of the radical/loyalist debate of the 1790s - militarism and reactions to invasion, workplace relations, religious schism and the management of scarcity. Detailed quantitative studies of food rioting, the use of the sedition laws and industrial disputes in this region show that all three have been seriously underestimated in the past, and that a national reassessment of the occurrence of these phenomena is now overdue.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the archivists and library staff who have helped me during the long hours of research that have gone into this thesis. Whilst all my visits to major depositories like the Public Record Office, British Library and City and County Record Offices have profited from the professional efficiency with which their documents are produced, days spent at less well-known centres - like the Bristol New Room, Devizes Museum and amongst the Horner papers at Mells Park - have been enjoyable for the genuine curiosity and relaxed hospitality offered me by largely volunteer staff. I particularly wish to thank Lord Oxford for allowing me to consult his family papers at Mells Park, and Michael McGarvie for his help in sorting them out. To Colin Johnstone and his staff at the Bath Guildhall Record Office I owe gratitude for the special attention and advice they have always given me, whilst the over-worked staff at Bath Library have laboured tirelessly to retrieve seemingly forgotten volumes from dusty basements despite the idiosyncrasies of an unfathomable catalogue. The staff at Bristol University Library, particularly its inter-library loans and special collections departments, have offered an exemplary service. I should like to thank Trevor Fawcett of the History of Bath Research Group and

Ken Rogers at the Wiltshire Record Office for the regular interest they have shown in my work, and Dr June Hannam of Bristol Polytechnic for much helpful criticism during its most formative stages. I am also grateful to Roy Porter for letting me see his unpublished paper on Thomas Beddoes. Finally and most importantly, I owe an enormous debt to my supervisor, John Styles, who has not only been a stimulating and constructive critic, but a source of continuous encouragement and enthusiasm.

Contents

Tables Appearing in the Text

Abbreviations

BL	British Library
	Add Ms — Additional Manuscript
LCS	London Corresponding Society
PRO	Public Record Office
	Assi — Assizes
	FO — Foreign Office
	HO — Home Office
	PC — Privy Council
	SP — State Papers
	TS — Treasury Solicitor
	WO — War Office
QS	Quarter Session
RA	Reeves Association (Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers)
SCRO	Somerset County Record Office
UB	United Britons
UE	United Englishmen
UI	United Irishmen
WRO	Wiltshire Record Office

Chapter One

Introduction:

Topography, Historiography and the Historical Background

The introductory section of this thesis provides a contextual background for the following chapters. Firstly, it discusses the nature of the region under discussion from a geographic, economic and administrative perspective. This is followed by a critical overview of existing academic work on the popular politics of the 1790s and an explanation of source materials used in my own research. Thirdly, an outline of relevant developments in the region during the decade immediately preceding the revolution in France introduces the subject-matter of the present study.

Economy, Society and the Structure of Authority

The region covered by this study of Somerset, Wiltshire and Bristol extends for approximately one hundred miles along its southern side (from Exmoor in the west to Salisbury in the east), and runs for some fifty miles

from north to south (between Crewkerne and Bristol or Downton and Cricklade).

From the chalk uplands of Salisbury Plain and the Marlborough Downs in the east to the low-lying peat levels of central Somerset, the cattle pastures of the south and the largely unexploited wilderness of the Exmoor, Mendip and Quantock hills in the west, the region supported a predominantly agricultural economy. But despite the verdict of an early nineteenth century topographer that most of Wiltshire could best be described as 'one vast sheep farm'[1], there was still considerable economic diversity in the region as a whole. Wilton, a small town in the heart of that 'sheep farm', was already establishing a reputation for carpet production, and the nearby city of Salisbury produced cutlery and steel goods besides flannels and linens. The historic and labour-intensive woollen producing district to either side of the central Somerset/Wiltshire border, which centred on Trowbridge, Bradford, Westbury and Frome, nestled close to the very productive Somerset coalfields between Frome and Radstock and between Timsbury and Brislington. A second woollen area existed in the south west of the district around Taunton, Wellington and Chard, connected with the trade in the neighbouring county of Devon, and there was another major coalfield at Kingswood to the north-east of Bristol. A

1. John Britton, A Topographical and Historical Description of the County of Wiltshire (London 1814), p.48.

fifty-mile stretch of coastline facing the Bristol Channel in the west supported navigation on the Parrett, Tone and Avon rivers and ports at Minehead, Porlock, Watchet, Bridgwater and Bristol. Paper-making flourished on the Axe, Frome and Avon.

The major population centres of Bristol and Bath, a mere twelve miles apart in the north of the region, were the most economically diverse. Bristol supported a wide variety of small industries - particularly glass and metal workings and businesses connected to its extensive international trade. This bustling city was quite unlike anywhere else in the region:

> Twenty to thirty sugarhouses, an abundance of sulphur, turpentine, vitriol and coal works; brass and iron foundries, distilleries, glass houses and manufactories of woollen stuffs and china are constantly at work. In beholding this large city at some distance, the mind is immediately filled with the idea of the inhabitants being totally occupied in trade and commerce[2].

Although Bath possessed an expanding riverside industrial base in its out parishes by the turn of the century, its economy was dominated by craft and retail trades and a large number of jobs in domestic service, reflecting its continuing importance as a resort[3].

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2. Rev. Nightingale, A Topographical and Historical Discription of the County of Somerset (London 1813), p.691.
3. See particularly S McIntyre, 'Bath: The Rise of a Resort Town 1660-1800' in P Clark (ed), Country Towns

No towns supported such large populations as Bath and Bristol (33,000 and 60-70,000 respectively[4] in 1801). The city of Salisbury in the south east corner of Wiltshire with 7,600 inhabitants was only marginally more populous than the woollen centre of Bradford on Avon (7,300) close to the Somerset border, and considerably smaller than the Somerset market and wool town of Frome (8,500). The broad expanse of Salisbury Plain effectively separated the city from the county's more concentrated population: the woollen workers of the western district where Trowbridge, for example, just three short miles from Bradford, supported nearly 6000 inhabitants.

Somerset, with a total county population of 300,000 against Wiltshire's 200,000, did not display such a clear geographical delineation between agricultural and industrial populations. The more even distribution of low-density upland areas, generally smaller land holdings in the agricultural districts, nearly twice the number of surviving market towns, and greater industrial diversity

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in Pre-Industrial England (Leicester 1981), pp.197-251.

4. The population of Bristol was often disputed. Quoting the 1811 census figure of 63,645, Nightingale suggested the true figure was nearer 100,000; op cit., p.691. Harrison suggests that eighteenth century Bristolians simply had an inflated sense of their city's size; M Harrison, Crowds and History: Mass Phenomena in English Towns 1790-1835 (Cambridge 1988), p.57. See also P T Marcy, Eighteenth Century Views of Bristol and Bristolians (Bristol 1966), pp.4-6. The census confirmed however that Bristol was the fifth largest English town in 1801, after London, Liverpool Manchester and Birmingham.

resulted in the southern towns of Taunton and Bridgwater and Wellington holding onto respectable populations (7,000, 5,000, and 4,000 respectively). Even Shepton Mallet, with its industrial base in the woollen industry in sharp decline by the close of the century, supported some 6000 people in 1801. Doubts over the future of the woollen industry throughout the region at the close of the eighteenth century was the cause of considerable westward migration out of Wiltshire and into Somerset where mining and quarrying offered relatively plentiful opportunities for employment[5]. Marshall noted particularly the rich variety of employment offered to the south of the coalfield in the triangle formed between the declining market towns of Somerton, Shepton Mallet and Glastonbury in 1796. This area was occupied in quarrying, lime-making, cereal growing, dairying, market gardening and sheep farming[6].

Wiltshire may have been substantially less populated than Somerset, but it returned twice the number of members to Parliament[7]. The unrepresentative peculiarities of the

5. S Jackson, 'Population Change in the Somerset - Wiltshire Border Area 1701-1800: a Regional Demographic Study', Southern History, 7, (1985) p.121.
6. W Marshall, The Rural Economy of the West of England, Vol 2 (London 1796), p.198.
7. Wiltshire's borough seats were Salisbury, Chippenham, Calne, Cricklade, Devizes, Heytesbury, Hindon, Downton, Great Bedwin, Marlborough, Ludgershall, Westbury, Wilton, Wotton Bassett, and Old Sarum. Somerset's were Bath, Bridgwater, Ilchester, Milborne Port, Minehead, Taunton and Wells. Each of these returned two members, as did the city of Bristol. For a detailed local study of the electoral system see John Cannon, The Parliamentary Representation of Six Wiltshire Boroughs, (Ph.D thesis, Bristol, 1958).

House of Commons did not begin and end with the often cited example of Old Sarum with its two members and electorate of seven. Even with its larger electorate of 140, the burgage borough of Chippenham remained firmly in the pocket of the Fludyer family, a leading clothier, throughout the eighteenth century[8]; and one seat at Wells, which had a similarly sized freeman electorate, was held from 1762-1812, without contest, by Clement Tudway[9]. Despite its large population, Bath's MPs were still elected solely by the thirty men of the Corporation, and the same was true of Salisbury where fifty-six men had the franchise, Devizes where there were thirty-eight, and at Calne, Marlborough, Malmesbury and Wilton[10]. Twenty-four select burgage tenants of Westbury (population 1790), comprised the borough electorate there. At the market town of Hindon on the other hand, about 25% of the population of 800 enjoyed the franchise,

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8. Lewis Namier, The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III (second edition, London 1957), p.129.
9. T H B Oldfield, The Representative History of Great Britain and Ireland: Being a History of the House of Commons, and of the Counties, Cities and Boroughs of the United Kingdom (London 1816), IV, p.429. This classic study, compiled by a veteran of the Society for Constitutional Information and the Hampden Clubs, remains indispensible.
10. A useful list of boroughs categorised by franchise appears in M Brock, The Great Reform Act (London 1973), pp.20-22. Not all of these were pocket boroughs but Calne, purchased by Lord Shelburne in the 1760s and held by his family until 1807 is a good example of one that was. See L Namier, op cit., p.137. Bath was an unpredictably independent borough until the 1790s when it passed into the control of two aristocratic families, the Pratts and the Thynnes. See John Cannon, 'Bath Politics in the Eighteenth Century', Proceedings of the Somerset Antiquarian and Natural History Society, 105 (1961), pp.100-105.

and a similar situation existed at Ilchester and Milborne Port in Somerset - both market towns of declining influence with populations of less than 1000. The largest franchise in Wiltshire was held by the small scot and lot borough of Wootton Bassett, but it amounted to less than 300 votes[11]. The 500 men who elected the MPs for Taunton made up the widest franchise in Somerset, although as a proportion of the total inhabitants (8%), it disincluded far more people than at Ilchester, Milborne or Hindon[12]. The presence of an elementary electorate in boroughs like Taunton encouraged contested elections, lively campaigning and a broad popular political culture, although such distractions were not to everybody's taste. John Billingsley blamed the decline of the woollen trade at Taunton on a popular pre-occupation with politics, and its relative prosperity at Wellington and Wiveliscombe on the complete absence of parliamentary representation in those towns[13]. A contemporary historian considered Taunton's political culture 'trying' and conducive of

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11. Cricklade had an electorate of about 1000 after four adjacent hundreds were enfranchised in 1782 in an attempt to stem the proven corruption of local landowners in bribing electors. The majority were therefore from outside the borough and a large proportion were from Malmesbury where they were de-barred from voting for their own representatives! Oldfield, op cit., 5, pp.200-207.
12. Taunton was a potwoller borough. A slightly more representative electorate existed at the scot and lot (rate-payers franchise) borough of Bridgwater where approximately 400 of the 5000 inhabitants could vote.
13. J Billingsley, op cit., p.295.

> idleness and debauchery into which are drawn a large proportion of the people to the hindrance of trade as well as the destruction of sobriety[14].

Bristol, with a freeman franchise of approximately 5000, had by far the most lively and boisterous political culture in the region and one of the seven largest borough electorates in the country[15]. Several large centres of population, especially in the central woollen region, were represented in parliament by their two county members alone. These included Frome, Trowbridge Warminster and Bradford.

Chartered boroughs with Corporations benefited from neither parity of powers nor representative local elections. The Corporation at Bath was a major land speculator, developer and property owner but the Borough of Taunton was forbidden by its charter from owning land, property or joint stock of money. The Corporation at nearby Bridgwater however, was prosperous enough to control revenues of about £10,000 per annum. All of these Corporations were self-electing and self-perpetuating. Some owed allegiance to a single landowning patron; Marlborough's Corporation, controlled entirely by Lord Ailesbury and consisting chiefly of his estate workers and servants, is the best known local example[16].

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14. J Toulmin, The History of the Town of Taunton (London 1791), p.66.
15. The other six were Leicester, London, Liverpool, Nottingham, Preston and Westminster - all with 5000 or more electors by the time of the Great Reform Act.
16. M Brock, op cit., (London 1973), p.23. Ailesbury also controlled the nominations for the parliamentary

Provision made for the maintenance of public order in borough charters was also extremely variable. Bristol's charter of 1710 vested full magisterial powers in the city's twelve aldermen (one for each ward), one of whom was a recorder and the presiding judge at the annual court of general gaol delivery. Aldermen appointed constables to police each ward, and were empowered as magistrates to read the Riot Act, swear in special constables and call out the Volunteers or regular troops if they felt the situation demanded it. They dealt with minor infringements of the public peace summarily in petty sessions, and presided over other cases at the city's Quarter Sessions. Magistrates surrendered direct involvement with the process of law only in those cases tried at the annual assize. Bristol's unusual status as both borough and county gave it an assize of its own, at which the senior judge from the Western Circuit sat after concluding the county assize each summer in Somerset[17].

The much earlier charter granted to Bath in 1590 provided for only four justices who, in addition to petty sessional duties, presided over the borough Quarter Sessions. After repeated complaints about the volume of work they were expected to undertake, the city was granted a new charter in 1794 which created an optional

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seats of Marlborough and Great Bedwin: see Oldfield, op cit., 5, pp.219-228.

17. The mechanism of local government in Bristol is described by M Harrison, op cit., pp.62-73.

extra nine borough magistrates[18]. Salisbury's charter provided for a large Corporation of 56, eleven of whom were magistrates[19]. At these ancient major centres, borough magistrates were complimented by those county justices who chose to live in the vicinity.

Charters did not always provide for a borough magistracy at all. Corporations without justices were Malmesbury, Calne, Chard, Chippenham, and Ilchester. Most of those with justices were entitled to hold Quarter Sessions independently of those for the county, but powers varied. Preclusion from trying felonies at borough sessions was no serious inconvenience for the authorities at Glastonbury, Wells or Westbury (where an annual 'borough' court could try nuisances only), but the same rule was felt very obstructive at the much larger city of Bath, where even cases of petty larceny had to be referred to the county sessions[20]. The town clerk lobbied government to permit a Special Commission to try Bath's Gordon rioters in 1780 for,

> if tryed at Bath, all expenses of witnesses and loss of time to attend the tryal at any different place (which must be many miles if at all) will be saved[21].

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18. S McIntyre, op cit., p.237.
19. J Britton, op cit., p.110.
20. These details may be found in the Appendix of the First Report of the Royal Commission on Municipal Corporations (1835); Malmesbury pp.75-80, Chard pp.1235-1242, Chippenham pp.1243-1250, Glastonbury pp.1281-1286, Wells pp.1363-1374, Westbury pp.1375-1379, and Bath pp.1109-1130.
21. SP 37/21, J Jeffreys to Lord Hillsborough, 18/6/1780.

He was rebutted. In theory at least, the borough sessions at Axbridge, Marlborough and Bridgwater could try all but capital offences but this restriction did not apply at Bristol or Salisbury[22]. In practice, there is little evidence that any of these borough courts were regularly used (except at Bristol, Bath and Bridgwater[23]), most corporations who paid the county rate preferring to commit offenders directly to the county courts. At Bridgwater alone, the expenses of prosecution were paid for by the county treasurer, a benefit which annually brought up to twenty cases for felony before the borough sessions in the 1830s. Elsewhere it was often to the advantage of a prosecutor to bring a case before the borough rather than the county sessions because costs were lower. Witnesses, who needed no travel expenses, could be sworn in at Axbridge for a fee of 1/- and an indictment could be drawn up for as little as 2/6d[24].

The relative sophistication of the peace-keeping apparatus in these towns and cities was not mirrored everywhere. Despite their size, Frome, Trowbridge,

22. First Report of the Royal Commission, op cit. Felonies were tried at Marlborough by 'mistake', in contravention of its charter, until 1824. I have found no cases of capital sentencing at Salisbury, but there are examples at Bristol. Axbridge pp.1089-1098, Marlborough pp.81-86, Bristol pp.1149-1228, Bridgwater pp.461-468 and Salisbury pp.1335-1347.
23. Salisbury's was convened bi-annually throughout the period of study, but often considered only a handful of cases. Few papers survive for the borough sessions at Marlborough from the 1790s, but they were used fairly frequently in the nineteenth century. The records for both are kept at the Wiltshire County Record Office.
24. First Report of the Royal Commission, op cit.

Warminster and Bradford for instance, were not chartered boroughs, were not represented by a Corporation, and consequently had no borough magistracy. Order was kept by parish constables and tythingmen elected at an annual court leet, and by the county bench in sporadic divisional petty sessions[25]. Law and order at Taunton, despite its being a chartered borough with a Corporation of 36 and six borough magistrates, laboured under a charter which granted no powers of arrest to any of its officers[26], and Wootton Bassett with a Corporation of fifteen and three borough magistrates was so small that the Royal Commission of 1835 considered the justices to be 'unavoidably from a class of persons incompetent to discharge the functions of a JP'[27].

The 1790s: The Historiographical Context

By long-standing historiographic consensus, the 1790s are considered something of a watershed in the development of English society. The decade is referred to as though its

25. In Wiltshire for example, there were 73 JPs by 1814, and 13 petty sessional divisions. See J Britton, op cit., p.62-3. There were only two divisions, east and west, in Somerset: J Billingsley, op cit., p.26.
26. J Nightingale, op cit., p.535.
27. First Report of the Royal Commission, op cit., pp.145-148. Similarly, the twelve capital burgesses and Alderman of Malmesbury were considered too ignorant and rowdy to maintain order in the town since they were all working men. The Alderman in 1835 was pig-killer; pp.75-80. Oldfield believed the lowly station of the illiterate burgesses at Malmesbury was an object of ridicule, illustrating too the limits of his tolerance towards outright representational reform: op cit., 5, pp.179-180.

coherence and pivotal importance were implicit and unarguable. 'The agitation of the 1790s', wrote E P Thompson,

> was extraordinarily intensive and far-reaching. It altered the sub-political attitudes of the people, affected class alignments, and initiated traditions which stretch forward into the present century.

The net effect was 'something like an English Revolution... of profound importance in shaping the consciousness of the post-war working class'[28]. Roger Wells considers the 1790s 'one of the most critical decades in modern British, Irish, French, indeed world history'[29]. Even J C D Clark, perhaps Thompson's most dismissive modern critic, and for whom 'parliamentary reform was relatively unimportant in the country at large during the 1790s', is prepared to accept that 'a disaffected plebeian consciousness can be identified from the 1790s'[30].

Interest in the 1790s did not begin with The Making of the English Working Class in 1963, but it was the first major historical work to make such elaborate claims about their epochal significance, and the first to take at all seriously the contribution of Corresponding,

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28. E P Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (London 1963; Pelican edition 1968), pp.111 & 194.
29. Roger Wells, Insurection: The British Experience 1795-1803 (Gloucester 1983), p.xiii.
30. J C D Clark, English Society 1688-1832: Ideology, social structure and political practice during the ancien regime, (Cambridge 1985), pp.345-6.

Constitutional and United Societies to popular political discourse. In so doing, it set an agenda for debate that has still to be fully resolved, despite the anti-marxist zealotry of the combative new Right in English history, so articulately represented in the work of J C D Clark. Central to this agenda are arguments about the genesis of social 'class', and the extent to which 'radical' and 'loyalist' ideologies attracted the support of 'the people'; arguments which have led in turn to disagreements about the scale of radical insurrectionism on the one hand and governmental repression on the other. 'No period', writes Linda Colley of the years 1789-1832, 'has been more ruthlessly anatomized in the search for social tensions and class consciousness'; so encouraging a view of the late eighteenth century as 'an inchoate medley of parochial and sectional voices'[31]. Historians' preference for treating the 1780-1832 period as a 'natural' schemata (an 'era of reform') during the course of which certain progressive trends may be shown to have happened, makes the 1790s - the pivotal decade - seem almost inseparable from it[32].

Thompson's convincing portrayal of 'underground' radical survival draws chiefly upon events in northern England, a

31. Linda Colley, 'Whose Nation? Class and Class Consciousness in Britain 1750-1830', Past and Present, 113, p.98.
32. Chronological progression reaches its most structured conclusion in John Foster, Class Struggle in the Industrial Revolution: Early Industrial Capitalism in Three English Towns (London 1974), in which stages of class formation are tightly defined on a Leninist model.

convention enlarged upon in subsequent studies by Gwyn Williams, John Baxter and Francis Donnelly, J R Dinwiddy, and Alan Booth[33]. Other notable regional studies of radicalism have later been added by Albert Goodwin, J Ann Hone, H O Alves and others, but a northern or north midland focus continues to dominate much of the research[34]. Lured into the controversy generated by Thompson's claims about northern English radicalism then, historians with an interest in case studies have tended to privilege some regions over others, leaving large gaps in the historiography. These have remained principally in non-industrialising rural counties, although work by K P Bawn, Malcolm Chase and Roger Wells has begun to address

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33. G A Williams, Artisans and Sans Culottes: Popular Movements in Britain and France During the French Revolution (London 1968) [mainly Yorkshire and Wales]; J L Baxter & F K Donnelly, 'The Revolutionary Underground in the West Riding: Myth or Reality?', Past & Present, 64 (1974); J R Dinwiddy, 'The Black Lamp in Yorkshire, 1801-1802,' Past & Present, 64 (1974); F K Donnelly & J L Baxter, 'Sheffield and the English Revolutionary Tradition, 1790-1820', International Review of Social History, XX (1975); Alan Booth, 'The United Englishmen and Radical Politics in the Industrial North West of England', International Review of Social History, XXXI (1986).
34. Albert Goodwin, The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution (London 1979) [Norwich, Manchester and Sheffield]; J Ann Hone, For the Cause of Truth: Radicalism in London 1796-1821 (Oxford 1982); H O Alves, The Paineites: The Influence of Thomas Paine in Four Provincial Towns 1791-1799, (Ph.D thesis, London 1982) [Manchester, Norwich, Sheffield, and Nottingham]; M P Thomas, Friends of Democracy: A Study of Working Class Radicalism in Derbyshire, 1790-1850; (M Phil thesis, Sheffield 1985); C B Jewson, The Jacobin City: A Portrait of Norwich and its Reaction to the French Revolution, 1788-1802 (Glasgow 1975); Robert Glen, Urban Workers in the Early Industrial Revolution (London 1984) [Stockport]. The field is in fact considerably wider than this and continues to expand prodigiously.

this issue by focussing on public order, agrarian unrest and reform in rural communities[35]. Whilst it is certainly the case that future broad national histories of radicalism in the 1790s will benefit enormously from these detailed provincial studies, we should be wary of either confirming or refuting Thompson too early in the game. Baxter and Donnelly's declaration of unequivocal support, made as early as 1975 and based on a study of 'our English revolutionary tradition' in Sheffield, found 'extensive evidence of inter-regional contacts which suggest an elementary national revolutionary movement'; and further, claimed that future research would 'show the comments of Thompson's hostile critics to be no more than particular ideological responses made without any serious consideration of the problem'[36]. In fact, the inter-regional contacts for which 'extensive evidence' is offered in this article are limited to Lancashire and the

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35. K P Bawn, Social Protest, Public order and Popular Disturbances in Dorset 1790-1838, (P h D thesis, Reading 1984); Malcolm Chase, The People's Farm: English Radical Agrarianism 1775-1840 (Oxford 1988); Roger Wells and Mick Reed (eds), Class, Conflict and Protest in the English Countryside 1700-1880 (London 1990). This work develops Wells' view that many rural food riots became politicised by radicals in the 1790s, detailed in Roger Wells, Wretched Faces: Famine in Wartime England 1793-1803 (Gloucester, 1988).
36. F K Donnelly & J L Baxter, 'Sheffield and the English Revolutionary Tradition', op cit., p.422. Their own work, charting 'a proto-working-class response to the advance of early industrial capitalism' is nothing if not ideological. For Baxter's own identification of 'the mass' as an 'unrealised or potential labour class' with a clear-cut Marxist destiny to pursue, see his Origins of the Social War in South Yorkshire: A Study of Capitalist Evolution and Labour Class Realisation in One Industrial Region c.1750-1855 (Ph D thesis, Sheffield 1976), eg. pp.109-110.

West Riding - hardly evidence of a national movement[37]. Robert Glen's thoughtful case study of the Stockport district does not bear the appearance of 'ideological response' but finds none of Baxter and Donnelly's 'extensive evidence' for revolutionary potential and finally finds it 'difficult to accept the view that a class-conscious working class existed during the Industrial Revolution'[38].

Baxter and Donnelly's fanciful determinism, which was far greater than Thompson's, may well help to explain the intellectual longevity of antagonistic views like Clark's. It is scarcely necessary to endorse Clark's own ideological alternative to 'the 1960s model of ancien regime English Society' - a sort of timeless 'confessional State' of deference and patriarchal aristocratic hegemony in which radicalism had been 'effectively disposed of' by the treason trials of 1794 - to find some sympathy for his driving conviction that 'historians have all too often reconstructed the radical case around those elements which seem self-evidently true to the modern mind'[39].

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37. ibid. p.407-8. I do not doubt the veracity of the evidence in northern England, and would only question its relevance to England as a whole.
38. Robert Glen, op cit., p.284.
39 J C D Clark, op cit., pp.6-7 & 347. Mischievously misquoting Thompson, Glen ascribes this process to 'the condescending manipulation of posterity': Glen, op cit., p.285.

One should perhaps be wary of the legacy of both the Whig and Marxist interpretations of history with their implied truths about the 'progress' of popular consciousness on a charted course through industrialisation and divergent 'class' ideology to the creation of battle-lines between the working class on the one hand, and Old Corruption (bolstered by its post 1832 alliance with the middle class) on the other. It does not seem helpful to me to compartmentalize radical artisan republicans as 'proto-working-class' (as Baxter and Donnelly have done) because it imposes a nineteenth century interpretation onto eighteenth century events, and at the same time devalues the actual experience of men and women in the late eighteenth century by making it a component of something which, as yet, it was not[40]. Class language had a considerable eighteenth century pedigree of course, but the separation of social and economic types into 'higher', 'middling' or 'lower' classes did not automatically imply entrenchment or division, although it may have been true, in as much as the experiences of any eighteenth century 'class' could be described as common, that mutual interests were seen to emerge. Penelope Corfield observed that the three-way separation of

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40. Thompson expressed his hostility to reading history 'in the light of subsequent preoccupations, and not as in fact it occurred', apparantly without considering class formation itself in this context: Making of the English Working Class, p.13. For a perceptive and mostly sympathetic critique of the Thompsonian pre-occupation with the 'making' of class as an index to the period, see Craig Calhoun, The Question of Class Struggle: Social Foundations of Popular Radicalism during the Industrial Revolution (Oxford 1982), especially chapters 1 and 2.

society reflects England's tripartite constitution and trinitarian theology - both of which accentuate the ideal (though scarcely realised) of balance rather than conflict. The term 'working class' may have been used for 'labouring class' for the first time in 1789, but evolving consciousness and ideology should not be inferred merely from evolving language[41].

The most frequently puzzling aspect of J E Cookson's study of popular opposition to the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars[42], is the way in which loaded terms like 'Liberalism' and 'Middle-class' are woven into the narrative as though both their meaning and their indispensability to the 'movement', were self-evident. If these 'middle orders' were adopting class-conscious political and social attitudes in their opposition to the war, what is one to make of the domination of loyalist associations and the Volunteers by the very same 'class'? Dror Wahrman's explorations of 'middle class language' in the 1790s are far more judicious for, as he says, 'it can

41. For a useful discussion of class see P J Corfield, 'Class by Name and Number in Eighteenth Century Britain', in P J Corfield (ed) Language, History and Class (Oxford 1991):'The eighteenth century in Britain was not a period of social inertia or conceptual stasis. There was a belief in change and social mutability rather than a strictly graded or strictly denoted social hierarchy', p.128. The reference to triadic forms appears on p.119. Corfield's citing of 1789 as birthday of the term 'working class' revises Asa Briggs' better known estimate that it was post-1815: Asa Briggs, 'The Language of Class in Early Nineteenth Century England' in A Briggs & J Saville (eds), Essays in Labour History (London 1967).
42. J E Cookson, The Friends of Peace: Anti-War Liberalism in England, 1793-1815 (Cambridge 1982).

be readily shown that in fact 'class' had none of the loaded meanings and implications which came much later to be associated with it'[43]. The common interests of the rioters against tolls on Bristol Bridge in 1793, or the food rioters in any market town in 1795-6 or 1800-01 defy coherent class analysis, and the fact that industrial disputes emphasised divisions between master and worker does not negate the divisions which also existed between worker and worker (and which were reflected in the contemporary use of the term 'labouring classes')[44].

Captivated briefly by the red herring of 'class', I R Christie, a politer critic of Thompson than Clark, explains the British 'avoidance of revolution' in the 1790s as 'an absence of acute class or caste division, or

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43. Dror Wahrman, 'National Society, Communal Culture: An Argument about the Recent Historiography of Eighteenth Century Britain', Social History, 17, 1 (1992); and 'Virtual Representation: Parliamentary Reporting and Languages of Class in the 1790s', Past and Present, 136 (1992). The quotation is from the latter article, p.92, footnote 22.
44. E P Thompson draws attention to the capacity of the 'plebs' to 'share a common consciousness - ideology and objectives - as petty consumers of the necessaries of life' regardless of trade, and he is demonstrably correct, but, as far as direct action against scarcity was concerned for example, this horizontal consciousness included middling-class butter boycotters and virtually anybody who was neither a government minister, or involved in the production, preparation or retail of market-place commodities. To separate farmers (poor or rich), millers, bakers and stall-holders from a 'plebs' which might include masters and journeymen, on class grounds clarifies nothing. Thompson goes on to 'hesitate' before calling his world of patricians and plebs 'a class culture', but nevertheless asserts 'One cannot understand this culture...unless one employs the concept... of class'. See Customs in Common, (London 1991), pp.63 and 72..

of excessively privileged groups whose situation was intolerably provoking to others'[45]. It seems a sadly shallow conjecture. Professor Christie does not define what he means by class in a late eighteenth century context, offers no critique of Thompson's view of class as 'happening' rather than 'thing' and makes no comment on Stedman Jones' influential reassessment of class divisions at the point of political corruption rather than economic exploitation[46]. Neither is there any consideration of Harold Perkin's perceptive comment that the repressive behaviour and sharply divisive language of both government and Reevesite loyalism 'played a far greater part in the development of class feeling than the movement which provoked it'[47]. In other words, that the methods employed to defeat radicalism were themselves productive of the 'class or caste division' which Christie claims was absent. Instead, class is simply introduced and disposed of, and then replaced by something called 'social cohesion', offering a

> cogent explanation why, despite occasional fears and alarms, there was no danger of revolution in Britain

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45. I R Christie, Stress and Stability in Late Eighteenth Century Britain: Reflections on the British Avoidance of Revolution (Oxford 1984), p.215.
46. E P Thompson, Making of the English Working Class, pp.12-13; Gareth Steadman Jones, Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History 1832-1982, (Cambridge 1983), p.169. It is implicit in Steadman Jones' work that privilege and property were not in themselves causes of class antagonism within the eighteenth century radical tradition.
47. Harold Perkin, The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880 (London 1969), p.195.

in the 1790s. Men were too concerned with the fascinating business of getting and spending[48].

Such confusion over what is actually meant by class strengthens the view that the term clouds rather than illuminates the events of the 1790s[49].

Following the publication in 1977 of the most critically unsophisticated attempt to de-bunk Thompson, Thomis and Holt's Threats of Revolution in Britain 1789-1848, the debate over the radical underground appeared to reach a climax with the publication of Roger Wells' finely detailed portrait of Britain's insurrectionist tendency in 1983[50]. Wells' principle achievement was to demonstrate convincingly not only the links between British and Irish radicalism in the 1790s, but their shared conspiratorial links with republican France - a

48. Ibid., p.93. The implication that there was therefore popular support for laissez-faire ideology and capitalist innovation despite widespread opposition to the end of the moral economy of prices and conditions of labour is not explored. 'Social cohesion', presented by Christie as value-free, is of course nothing of the sort. Indeed the non-specificity of the term has allowed John Foster to use it in relation to class/community solidarity! See John Foster, Class Struggle in the Industrial Revolution (London 1974), p.128.
49. Some recent work is particularly confusing. Peter Linebaugh has subtitled an entire chapter, 'The London Working Class of the 1790s' and writes as though the legitimacy of the term was self-evident: The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century (London 1991), chapter 12.
50. M I Thomis and P Holt, Threats of Revolution in Britain 1789-1848 (London 1977); Roger Wells, Insurrection: The British Experience 1795-1803, (Gloucester 1983). The scope and breadth of the evidence assembled by Wells suggests widespread revolutionary planning in the later 1790s and makes a nonsense of Thomis and Holt's claim that 'scarcely any' radicals were involved in it.

three-sided connection that reduces the importance of the number of participants in England. The strength of this argument was significantly increased by Marianne Elliott's research into Franco-Irish republican co-operation[51]. Whilst the study of strengths and weaknesses within insurrectionary movements has prompted a valid and necessary debate, the tendency for historians like Wells, Baxter and Donnelly on the one hand and Christie, Thomis and Holt on the other to occupy entrenched positions for or against revolutionary potential has been less helpful. Armed force may have been an option considered by certain individuals most of the time, and by many individuals in extraordinary times, but there seems little reason for investing it with the custom and practice of a 'revolutionary tradition', whether in Sheffield or Shepton Mallet. The principle strength of Wells' Insurrection lies in the detail with which it draws together, from so many disparate sources, the commitment and endeavour of neglected British revolutionaries during the later 1790s, particularly in the section chronicling radical involvement in the naval mutinies of 1797. Wells' insistence on the reality of deep-seated social conflict offers a more convincing approach to the period than Christie's organic social cohesion, but polarised conditions of nascent class war or forlock-tugging deference were not those of the 1790s.

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51. Marianne Elliott, Partners in Revolution: The United Irishmen and France (Yale 1982).

Although E P Thompson was criticised as long ago as 1965 for his neglect of the 'flag-saluting, foreigner-hating, peer-respecting side of the plebeian mind'[52], the serious consideration of popular loyalism in the 1790s has still to reach maturity. The availability of a modern published edition of the papers of the London Corresponding Society[53] while we still have no printed edition of the Reeves papers in the British Library illustrates the trend. The study of loyalism began with compartmental studies of John Reeves' Association movement and of Volunteering[54], but has moved fruitfully in more recent years towards the consideration of national identity, patriotism, and popular attachments to monarchy and

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52. Geoffrey Best, review of 'The Making of the English Working Class', Historical Journal, VIII (1965), p.278. Thompson acknowledged the fault in a postscript to the paperback edition of Making of the English Working Class, pp.916-7.
53. Mary Thale (ed), Selections from the Papers of the London Corresponding Society 1792-1799, (Cambridge 1983).
54. Austin Mitchell, 'The Association Movement of 1792-3', Historical Journal, IV (1961); Donald Ginter, 'The Loyalist Association Movement of 1792-3 and British Public Opinion', Historical Journal IX (1966). The best full study is J Caulfield, The Reeves Association: A Study of Loyalism in the 1790s (Ph D Thesis, Reading 1988). The Reeves movement is also covered by Black, The Association, op cit. Volunteering received early attention from a large number of ninetenth century military historians and often written as bucolic local studies. More recently we have had J R Western, 'The Volunteer Movement as an Anti-Revolutionary Force 1793-1801', English Historical Review LXXI (1956) which treats it purely as a tool of the Associations, and more sophisticated work by J E Cookson, 'The English Volunteer Movement of the French Wars 1793-1815: Some Contexts', Historical Journal XXXI (1989) and Austin Gee, The British Volunteer Movement 1793-1807 (Ph D thesis, Oxford 1989).

constitutionalism[55]. Unfortunately, this has brought problems as well as benefits, for Linda Colley seems substantially to have misunderstood the most important factor in the creation of Reevesite loyalism in the 1790s - mass inclusivity as an expression of national consensus. In her paper 'Whose Nation?', she quite rightly identified the misgivings of some of the elite about popular involvement, and it is true that the mass were never permitted to participate in directing the Associations, but their involvement, within defined parameters of acceptability (as effigy-burners or subscribers to national war funds for instance) was taken extremely seriously. From her assumption that the ruling elite discouraged popular participation, it was only natural that Colley's argument should move on to assert that 'the growing sensitivity and receptivity to the nation which undoubtedly existed was spontaneously generated from below'[56]. There was, in fact, nothing remotely spontaneous about the rise of Reevesism or any

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55. Hugh Cunningham, 'The Language of Patriotism 1750-1914', History Workshop Journal, 12, (1981); Linda Colley, 'The Apotheosis of George III: Loyalty, Royalty and the British Nation 1760-1820', Past and Present, 102 (1984); Linda Colley, 'Whose Nation? Class and Nationasl Consciousness in Britain 1750-1830', Past and Present, 113 (1986); Gerald Newman, The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History 1740-1830 (London 1987); Raphael Samuel (ed), Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of the British National Identity, 1, History and Politics, (London 1989); Marilyn Morris, The Monarchy as an Issue in English Political Argument During the French Revolutionary Era (Ph D thesis, London 1988).
56. Linda Colley, 'Whose Nation', op cit., p.109. The same author's new book, Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837 (Yale 1992), was being printed while this thesis was being written.

of its public demonstrations of power, as this thesis will show. Reevesism was undoubtedly orchestrated by the propertied classes. Professor Christie's theory of organic social cohesion is flawed for the same reasons; both writers have mistaken nurture for nature. Genuine popular identification with the nation was indeed strong, and it had been for many years, but patriotism was never the exclusive property of Reevesism or the Pitt regime.

Other writers have produced useful overviews of popular loyalism (as distinct from the intellectual conservative response which sought to control it), which concentrate on plebeian involvement in the politics of 'Church and King'[57]. In the process however, the compartmentalist approach to both radicalism and loyalism has unwittingly assisted in the imposition of another 19th or 20th century anachronism onto the politics of the 1790s - that of an absolutist and clear cut dialectical struggle between an artificially constructed 'proto-left' and 'right'. Historians working directly in the field of popular politics in the 1790s have, for the most part, obscured the most important findings of their colleagues' work on patriotism and nationalism; namely that loyalism provides us with a common key to the understanding of

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57. Alan Booth, 'Popular Loyalism and Public Violence in the North West of England 1790-1800', Social History VIII (1983); Robert Dozier, For King, Constitution and Country: The English Loyalists and the French Revolution (Lexington 1983); H T Dickinson, 'Popular Conservatism and Militant Loyalism 1789-1815', in H T Dickinson (ed), Britain and the French Revolution 1789-1815 (London 1989).

radicalism and constitutionalism, Reevesism and reformism, innovation and conservatism[58]. Marianne Elliott's assertion that 'The important factor in the situation of 1801 was not that the working classes were either loyal or disloyal, for they were capable of being both in quick succession', is less helpful than it sounds because she is careless in her definition of loyalism. Thus, 'Nor is there any foundation for the traditional view that the English working classes were essentially loyal'[59]. By leaving the interpretation of loyalism open, she invites the assumption that the 'working classes' were republican, which by and large they were not, although they may have felt disloyal to the regime of Prime Minister Pitt. Loyalist radicalism is not paradoxical in a late eighteenth century context, and whilst it may lead us to a 'constitutional' interpretation of insurrectionism and even a non-republican (in the conventional sense of 'republican') reading of 'Rights of Man'[60], it does not imply an

58. Particularly useful work includes James Epstein, 'Understanding the Cap of Liberty: Symbolic Practice and Social Conflict in Early Nineteenth Century England', Past and Present 122 (1989); and James Epstein, 'The Constitutional Idiom: Radical Reasoning, Rhetoric and Action in Early Nineteenth Century England', Journal of Social History (Spring 1990).
59. Marianne Elliott, 'The Despard Conspiracy Reconsidered', Past and Present, 75 (1977), p.53.
60. It will be argued in the present work that even revolutionists were able to construe insurrection as a constitutionally legitimate defence against tyranny and corruption, that its driving force remained the acheivement of corrective reforms, and that these principles survived most visibly in the 'physical force' arguments within Chartism some fifty years later. A non-republican reading of Paine rests, like a non-Pittite reading of Reeves Associations, on the

absence of serious social and political conflict (as Christie and his followers believe) during the 1790s. Nor does it imply any weakness in the argument that the Pitt administration waged, or at least permitted, a very real 'reign of terror' against English radicals. Indeed, this thesis will take particular issue with Clive Emsley's influential de-bunking of the English 'Terror'[61].

Historians of the 1790s have taken a particular interest in the crowd, and logically enough since it clearly represents the very bedrock of popular politics, and illuminates the parameters by which 'social cohesion' and deference were constrained. Mark Harrison's study, timely in its challenge to the prevailing 'orthodoxy' of crowds chiefly as manifestations of protest (for which he lays the blame on Thompson and Rude), has begun the work of restoring diversity to our understanding of crowd events[62]. Although he discusses loyalist gatherings

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close examination of ambiguities in key texts. As will be seen, such ambiguities inspired selectivity.

61. Clive Emsley, 'An Aspect of Pitt's Terror: Prosecutions for Sedition During the 1790s', Social History, 6 (1981); Clive Emsley, 'Repression, Terror and the Rule of Law in England During the Decade of the French Revolution', English Historical Review, 100 (1985). For the influence these articles have had, see for example H T Dickinson, 'Popular Conservatism', op cit., p.103: 'It has been shown that the machinery of repression set up by the government was neither as effective nor as ruthless as was previously thought'. Professor Emsley's work is constructively challenged by Marilyn Morris's thesis, op cit., pp.209-221.

62. Mark Harrison, Crowds and History: Mass Phenomena in English Towns 1790-1835, (Cambridge 1988); George Rude, The Crowd in History 1730-1848: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England (New York 1964, 2nd edition London 1981); E P Thompson, 'The

however, Harrison offers no substantial analysis of crowd motivation and scarcely mentions the significant and huge crowds who burnt effigies of Thomas Paine throughout Britain at the behest of the Reeves Association movement in 1792-3. We have still to see a fully perceptive analysis of this particular phenomena, and I suspect it will have to wait until historians stop thinking of Reeves crowds exclusively as Pittite loyalists demonstrating their opposition to radicalism. Harrison's overriding concern with the timing of crowds has led him to a weak analysis of related issues, particularly of the strength of radicalism, which is dismissed as insignificant at Bristol (Harrison's best documented regional case study) on extremely flimsy evidence[63]. There is a growing body of literature on rioting crowds however, and in the French Revolutionary era with its severe scarcity periods, this has focussed most often upon food-rioting, its relationship to the 'moral economy'/laissez faire debate, and (especially in Roger Wells' case) on its relationship to radicalism[64]. Thompson's 'moral economy' has become one of the best known, most influential and seemingly parameterless

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Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', Past and Present, 50 (1971).

63. Mark Harrison, op cit., pp.237-241.
64. John Bohstedt, Riots and Community Politics in England and Wales 1790-1810 (Harvard 1983); John Stevenson 'Food Riots in England 1792-1818', in John Stevenson and R Quinault (eds), Popular Protest and Public Order (London 1974); Alan Booth, 'Food Riots in the North West of England 1790-1801', Past and Present, 77 (1977); Roger Wells, Wretched Faces: Famine in Wartime England 1793-1803 (Gloucester 1988). These studies are all heavily influenced by Thompson's 1971 'Moral Economy' article, op cit.

interpretative disciplines of eighteenth century historiography and it has given rise to an expanding interest in the related study of 'custom' and the pressures brought upon it[65].

The growing influence of Smith's Wealth of Nations during this period, together once again with wartime economic recession and the rise of political organisation amongst the lower orders, has led to a further 'splinter' interest: industrial dispute and trades unionism[66]. The debate over the use and severity of the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800[67] (which often mirrors interestingly a parallel debate over the use and severity of the laws against radical societies and seditious speech), together with ample evidence of strikes and disputes during the preceding years, has made this another fruitful area of study, but it too has been dogged by compartmentalism. Harrison's dismissal of radicalism in a specialist study of crowds thus finds its echo in Dobson's study of eighteenth century trade disputes, and even in Adrian

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65. Thompson's own response to the broadening of his phrase to cover issues like 'fair wages' forms a belligerant central chapter to Customs in Common, pp.259-351.
66. The two standard works are C R Dobson, Masters and Journeymen: A Prehistory of Industrial Relations 1717-1800 (London 1980) - specifically about trades unionism; and John Rule, The Experience of Labour in Eighteenth Century Industry (London 1981) - a broader study of the workers' world.
67. See for example, James Moher, 'From Suppression to Containment: Roots of Trade Union Law to 1825' in J Rule (ed), British Trade Unionism 1750-1850: The Formative Years (London 1988) and J V Orth 'The English Combination Laws Reconsidered' in Hay and Snyder (eds) Labour, Law and Crime: An Historical Perspective (London 1987)..

Randall's otherwise peerless work on workers' resistance to machinery in the West Country woollen industry[68].

As yet we have not the benefit of even a compartmentalist study of women and politics in the 1790s. Sheila Rowbotham's declaration that 'English Jacobins were not primarily concerned with the rights of women', may be true, but it does not therefore follow that they were substantially unconcerned[69]. Barbara Taylor has offered evidence that a number of male 'petit-bourgeois radicals' became receptive to the feminism of Wolstonecraft in the 1790s, but we still know surprisingly little of women's' involvement with the radical societies, despite the growing body of work on women in the Chartist movement a

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68. C R Dobson, Masters and Journeymen: A Pre-history of Industrial Relations 1717-1800 (London 1980), contains such ill-conceived generalisations as 'London journeymen were as hostile to the French Revolution as to that nation's manufactures' (p.122); Adrian Randall, Before the Luddites: Custom, Community and Machinery in the English Woollen Industry 1776-1809 (Cambridge 1991). It suits Randall's argument that radicalism was stronger in the West Riding than in the West Country, to call Jacobinism in the latter 'muted'. Yet, as we shall see, his negative conclusions about West Country radicalism are the result of uncharacteristically incomplete research.

69. Sheila Rowbotham, Hidden from History: 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against it, (London 1973, 3rd edition 1977), p.22. Thomas Spence was one male propagandist who aimed political tracts directly at women however: 'And whereas we have found our husbands, to their indelible shame, woefully negligent and deficient about their own rights, as well as those of their wives and infants, we women mean to take up the business ourselves... wherefore you will find the business much more seriously and effectually managed in our hands than ever it has been yet', Thomas Spence, The Rights of Infants, (London 1797).

half century later[70]. Women's place in the workforce and their loss of earnings through the contraction of out-work has now become the stuff of standard textbooks of economic history[71], while John Bohstedt and E P Thompson have taken up afresh the debate over women's' involvement in market-place crowds and in the organisation of domestic economy[72]. That at least some women took an active role (and as women) in the London Corresponding Society is indisputable for they had their own meeting place at Bermondsey by 1793[73]. Yet still they await their historian.

It has already been noted that existing work on popular politics in the 1790s is heavily biased towards northern sources. The region under consideration here, whilst not entirely neglected, has aroused little previous interest. Muriel Vlaeminke's thesis on Bristol in the war years[74] is an exception, but a poor index to popular politics in

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70. Barbara Taylor, Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century (London 1983), pp.1-18. On women in Chartism, see for example Dorothy Thompson, The Chartists (London 1984) pp.120-151.
71. See especially Maxine Berg, The Age of Manufactures: Industry, Innovation and Work in Britain 1700-1820, (London 1985) pp.129-158, but also Bridget Hill, Women, Work and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth Century England (Oxford 1989).
72 John Bohstedt, 'Gender, Household and Community Politics: Women in English Riots 1790-1810', Past and Present, 120 (1988). His revisionism is tackled by Thompson in Customs in Common, (London 1991) pp.305-336.
73. TS 11/966/3510b, anonymous information dated 25/9/1793, reporting 'a society of women' who met at New Lane, Gainsford St, Horsley Down, on Saturdays.
74. M Vlaeminke, Bristol During the French Revolutionary War 1793-1802 (M Litt thesis, Bristol 1984).

the city. Announcing a 'total absence of references' to suggest anything to the contrary, Vlaeminke states: 'Of all the major British cities, Bristol was the least involved in radical political movements' and that the 'very troubled year of 1795' went by with 'hardly a mention' of radical politics at Bristol. The Constitutional Society are dismissed as

> never more than a small minority group, without a mass following among the ordinary people, who seemed to be rather more easily whipped up to insult and attack 'Jacobins' and 'revolutionaries'[75].

Mark Harrison's version of Bristol radicalism largely concurs with Vlaeminke's and has already been commented upon[76]. R S Neale has approached radicalism in Bath, the second major town in the region, from a similar perspective. Two men tried for sedition in 1794 were mere 'straws in the wind... pointers only to an underground movement of social protest' in Neale's opinion, submerged in a city where loyalist views were 'more widespread and widely held'[77].

This thesis will test and contest historical judgements like these for their beguiling simplicity and contend

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75. M Vlaeminke, op cit., pp.102-111.
76. Mark Harrison, op cit., pp.274-183. See also H T Dickinson, British Radicalism and the French Revolution 1789-1815 (Oxford 1985), p.13, in which it is stated that Bristol's Constitutional Society did not survive beyond 1795.
77. R S Neale, Bath, A Social History 1680-1850, or 'A Valley of Pleasure Yet a Sink of Iniquity' (London 1981), pp.313-4. This opinion is reached without any reference to sources in the Home Office, Privy Council or Treasury Solicitors' files.

that whilst the strength of radicalism has been underestimated, the hegemony of loyalism has been consistently misunderstood. It will also be argued that regional studies are indispensable to the assessment of eighteenth century history for two reasons. The first is that Britain was still a nation of regions in the 1790s, where executive and judicial powers, working communities and popular custom were variable. Broad overviews of political movements in these years risk inaccuracy if they take insufficient account of regional detail. The second is that the survival of evidence from this period is sporadic and often obscure. Without the painstaking research in local private archives, libraries, newspapers and record offices that only a regional study can realistically undertake, broad overviews will once again risk inaccuracy. Baxter and Donnelly's case for a 'national revolutionary movement' for instance (referred to above), has still to be proved. Alan Booth, examining the same northern 'inter-regional links', found insufficient evidence for a national conspiracy and only 'indirect' links with the French Directory[78]. On the other hand, Roger Wells records the development of plans amongst Irish and English revolutionaries to 'cause a rising at the same moment... in the capital and, if possible, in Bristol and Manchester', but the success or

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78. Alan Booth, Reform, Repression and Revolution: Radicalism and Loyalism in the North West of England 1789-1803 (Ph D thesis, Lancaster 1989), pp.274-5.

failure of organisation for this enterprise at the South Western end remains unexplored[79].

In many ways, although still unresolved, the debate about insurrectionism appears to have moved on and taken a number of new directions. The future of research into the 1790s must now lie in the successful coalition of those 'strands' which presently describe (or ought to describe) the interests of historians currently working in the field[80]. Closer attention to social vocabularies and symbolic factional languages may present future historians with the best means of cutting an intelligible path through the national and parochial consciousness of the late eighteenth century. Interestingly, Stedman Jones' interest in 'Languages of Class', pursued by several subsequent historians, and most recently by Dror Wahrman, has aroused the interest of art historians like John Barrell via related work on popular iconography by James Epstein, Miles Taylor and others[81]. Many themes

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79 Roger Wells, Insurrection, p.126.

80. These must include high and low politics, religious controversy, patriotism and nationalism, the law, the position of women, work practice and technology, custom and community, rural/urban outlooks, social deference, crowds and public order, the market-place, anti-slavery, 'liberalsism', class division, and language. All have their specialists.

81. On verbal language see Steadman Jones, op cit., James Epstein, 'The Constitutional Idiom', op cit., and 'Radical Dining, Toasting and Symbollic Expression in Early Nineteenth Century Lancashire: Rituals of Solidarity', Albion, 20 (1988); Michael Sonenscher, The Sans Culottes of the Year II: Rethinking the Language of Labour in Revolutionary France', Social History, 9, 3 (1984); David Womersley, 'Gibbon's Unfinished History: The French Revolution and English Political Vocabularies', Historical Journal, 35, 1 (1992); and Dror Wahrman, op cit. On visual

remain unexplored. For instance, Francis Wheatley's successful print series of 1795, the 'Cries of London', has still not been considered against the contextual background of war, scarcity and disorder in which they were produced. Further detailed explorations of the visual language of the 1790s will undoubtedly reveal much about the meanings behind popular loyalism, inclusivity, and crowds. Indeed, less preoccupation with the timetable of class formation may ultimately lead to a drama in which the motivation of the players escapes pre-judgement and in which the synthesis of loyalism is reconstructed without prejudice.

> The soil of common life was at that time
> Too hot to tread upon. Oft said I then,
> And not then only, 'What a mockery this
> Of history, the past and that to come!
> Now do I feel how all men are deceived,
> Reading of nations and their works, in faith,
> Faith given to vanity and emptiness;
> Oh! laughter for the page that would reflect
> To future times the face of what now is![82]

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language see James Epstein, 'Understanding the Cap of Liberty', op cit., and Miles Taylor, 'John Bull and the Iconography of Public Opinion in England c. 1712-1929', Past and Present, 134, (1992). Barrell's most recent work is The Birth of Pandora and the Division of Knowledge (London 1992), but see also The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting, 1730-1840 (Cambridge 1983) and The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt (New Haven 1986).

82. William Wordsworth, The Prelude, Book Nine, 92-100.

A Note on Sources

I have attempted to use the widest possible range of source material in the preparation of this thesis. Past studies have tended to privilege the most accessible documents in public repositories whilst neglecting lesser-known sources in private hands. Some have constructed views about political allegiance and 'loyalism' without even consulting the John Reeves papers in the British Library. At least two crowd historians, both of whom concerned themselves with the assessment of mass loyalism as well as popular radicalism, fall into this category. John Bohstedt visited the British Library but not the Reeves papers and Mark Harrison avoided the building altogether. R S Neale's dense social history of Bath meanwhile considers 'the consciousness of the people' and the city as a later 'radical utopia' almost entirely in the light of local newspaper reports[83]. Since it is a contention of this thesis that the under-statement of radicalism in this region has been due to an insufficiency of research, I have used sources as exhaustively as possible in my efforts to uncover its history. As the tables in the appendix illustrate, widely-based research has enabled the most complete enumerative analysis to date of popular movements in the region.

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83. See Bohstedt and Harrison's bibliographies, op cit., and the footnotes of Neale's final two chapters, op cit.

The ease with which eighteenth century events could become lost to modern view through the absence of 'official' record is demonstrated particularly well in the case of crowd disturbances. Not one of the three alleged Church and King riots of the period was reported in the surviving correspondence to the Home Office, War Office, London Corresponding Society or the London Reeves Association. Only one was reported in the London press and even that was ignored by every provincial newspaper. There were no arising legal proceedings, so assize and quarter session records are equally unhelpful. These riots, at Taunton in 1792, Bath in 1794 and Bristol in 1797, appear only in the pages of the Morning Chronicle (Taunton), Henry Hunt's Memoirs (Bath), and a pamphlet written by one of the victims (Bristol)[84]. Similarly there are instances of food riots and weaving and mining strikes severe enough to be called 'insurrections', but which were recorded only in the personal papers of interested observers[85].

Throughout the various sections of this thesis I have therefore made free use of the correspondence of military

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84. John Caulfield, op cit., p132; Memoirs of Henry Hunt Esquire, Written by Himself, 2 (London 1821), pp.43-4; A Statement of Facts Relative to the Riot in Union Street, Bristol (Bristol 1797).
85. See for example the food riot at Hilmarton in July 1795, recorded only in correspondence to Lord Ailesbury from an estate manager, WRO 1300/2343. A weavers' strike at Frome in January 1795 is mentioned in a letter from Thomas Horner to Sheppard in the Mells Manor Muniments. For the Lodge pit strike at Kingswood see Victory Purdey's Pocket Book, entry dated Monday January 5th 1795, Wesley New Room Chapel, Bristol.

commanders, magistrates and prominent citizens with central government (Public Record Office WO1, HO 42 & 43 and PC1), local authority archives, legal papers (Assize, plus county and borough sessions) and complete runs of all the relevant provincial newspapers, selected national newspapers. These basic sources are augmented by the Reeves and LCS papers in the British Library, and the personal papers and correspondence of a number of landed families including the Pagets, Horners and Jolliffes of Somerset, and the Lords Pembroke and Ailesbury of Wiltshire. Both County Record Offices contain diverse small collections of Volunteer papers and these were particularly useful for the preparation of chapter five, whilst chapter two has benefited considerably from the previously unused papers of the Bath Reeves Association in the city's Guildhall archive. I have been aware throughout of course, that no matter how wide the net is cast, it is predominantly through the eyes of the articulate and the propertied that the historian is forced to view the events of the late eighteenth century. Indeed, the central problem facing any evaluation of plebeian loyalism, and perhaps the reason its treatment has often been so rudimentary, is that those whom it most deeply effected have left such little record of their concerns and values behind them.

The Contextual Background: Popular Politics in the 1780s

The quality of political representation in eighteenth century Somerset, Wiltshire and Bristol has been outlined above. This section considers the political experience of the 1780s as an aid to understanding the wide-ranging reforms advocated from an unprecedentedly broad social base in the 1790s. Just as political discourse in the 1790s was largely shaped by constitutional innovation in France, so the 1780s fell under the influence of American republicanism. Damaged financial stability, interrupted trade, and wounded national pride all contributed to a lively public debate on the conduct and propriety of the war, and on the constitutional questions raised by the strong influence wielded by the Crown over North's ministry. Imbalance between King, Lords and Commons in the eighteenth century legislature was frequently thought to stem from the system of patronage and a surfeit of royal influence over the selection of ministers. Wyvill's Associated Counties proposed very limited reforms in 1780 and their founder made no secret of his hostility to universal male suffrage. It was partly due to the failure of the Associated campaign to achieve a meaningful measure of improved legislative accountability that moves for more sweeping democratic reforms were taken up by the disenfranchised in subsequent years. Wyvill's failure was therefore as salient a factor in the establishment of Corresponding Societies as the timing of the French Revolution and the publication of Rights of Man.

Allegations of corrupt practices at an uncustomary flurry of contested elections in the early 1780s helped sustain local enthusiasm for the Associated County movement's moderate programme for a more 'equal representation' following the resignation of the North ministry in 1782. Through annual elections and the creation of a hundred new County seats, it was hoped to 'reduce the influence of the Crown and alleviate the distresses of the people'. But, haunted still by the spectre of national insolvency; the well-heeled and business-conscious County Associators prioritised control of the public accounts and the abolition of unmerited and expensive sinecures over electoral reform[86]. The County agitation was complimented by specific campaigns in certain boroughs aimed at ending the manipulation of franchises. At Wells in 1780 for instance, a Loyal and Constitutional Society of Independent Freemen pledged continuing support for George Lovell, a defeated independent candidate in the election and leading County Associator, who had sworn

> to free us from the slavery and oppression that we have laboured under these fourteen years past, by

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86. Serious electoral corruption was alleged at Wells (1780), Cricklade (1781) and Bristol (1784). At Cricklade, 70 electors were convicted under the Bribery Act after the defeat of the pro-reform candidate, Samuel Petrie. The enfranchisement of the neighbouring hundreds was the work of the brief Rockingham ministry of 1782-3, a party measure in John Cannon's view; see J Cannon, Parliamentary Reform 1640-1832 (Cambridge 1973), p.85, f.3. See also Bath Chronicle 30/8/1781. The aims and objectives of the Somerset Association are taken from the Bath Chronicle 30/3/1780 & 27/6/1782.

> the making of honorary burgesses to take away our ancient Rights and Freedom of Election[87].

The Wells freemen's linking of Loyalism and Constitutionalism with parliamentary reform inspired no vitriolic counterclaims of 'seditious levelling' from the supporters of Old Corruption - as it would almost certainly have done a decade or so later - and no vilification in the newspaper press. The Bath Chronicle, which was to drop its advocacy of reform during the 1790s, complained at the county's 'supine' attitude to it in 1783 and fully backed Pitt's endeavours to steer reform legislation through parliament. In the 1790s however, Pitt would become the champion of bills designed to 'gag' the demands of the reform movement[88]. This is not to say that attempts to discredit the movement as disloyal and unpatriotic were not made during the 1780s, but that the scale of the reaction was neither so great, nor so credible.

Suspicions that the 'Gordon' rioting which so unsettled not only London, but the 'poor invalids' and visitors to the 'agreeable asylum' of Bath in 1780, had been manipulated by an Opposition conspiracy to unseat the government were not uncommon. Commenting on the negligence of the civil power for not preventing the Bath incident, Sir James Caldwell reported the Town Clerk to

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87. Bath Chronicle 30/3/1780 & 5/10/1780.
88. Bath Chronicle 23/1/1783.

government ministers, reminding them that the Clerk was patron to John Pratt - son of an Opposition MP opposed to the American war and friendly with John Wilkes - and who would shortly secure his own election at Bath. He also appeared to believe that colliers were being manipulated by Opposition pay-masters to attack on the city gaol and release captured rioters[89]. Bath's civil power learned much from the Gordon Riot episode. The fragility of social equilibrium and the inadequacy of the forces that could be mustered in its defence would influence the organisation of law and order in the ensuing decade. In 1780, as Caldwell noted, it was finally realised that the city's customary reliance on the services of three hundred pole-wielding chairmen, a handful of constables and a few Volunteers counted for 'absolutely nothing in this town, so near Bristol and very large collieries'. The mayor, John Chapman, had been able to gather no more than 'twenty or thirty' of the Volunteers, and the chairmen, although paid for their trouble, were so little trusted that 'two persons from each street are to see that they keep their post'[90]. Within ten days, the arrangement with the chairmen had collapsed. The town

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89. (S)tate (P)apers 37/21/155, Jefferys to Lord Hillsborough 16/6/1780; SP 37/21/68, J Caldwell to Lord Hillsborough 11/6/1780. See also C Barrett (ed), Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay 1778-1840, (London 1904), 1, pp.421-9 for an eyewitness account of the Bath disturbances and similar views to Caldwell's. A selection of official correspondence from SP 37 is reprinted in J A Williams, Post-Reformation Catholicism in Bath (Catholic Record Society, London 1975), Vol 1.
90. SP 37/21, J Caldwell to Lord Hillsborough, 11/6/1780; and J Chapman to Lord Hillsborough, 15/6/1780.

clerk considered that, since 'the inferior class of men' had proved so 'very remiss and negligent in their duty', the tranquility of the city might better be secured by permitting 'extra-judicial' patrols of 'tradesmen and reputable persons' instead[91]. The chairmen would continue to act as an unofficial police force at Bath during the 1790s, dispersing moral economists and informing against 'jacobins'; but they were directed by an increased number of borough magistrates and joined by a much stronger Volunteer force after 1794. Moreover, when incendiaries terrorised the city's commercial centre in 1800, 'respectable' civilian tradesmen were mustered once again to patrol the streets by night. As later chapters will show, Bath's magistracy remembered the Gordon Riot very well when disorder threatened during later years, recalling even the names of participants and harbouring fresh suspicions against them.

John Noble, the Bristolian merchant and future mayor, held responsible during the 1790s for ordering the deaths of the 'rioters' on Bristol Bridge, appeared disappointed by the political naivety of the Gordon riots. 'Alas', he lamented, 'how much more commendable would such zeal appear if it were to force our ministers to a peace with America'[92]. These sentiments would have met the approval

91. SP 37/21, J Jefferys to Lord Hillsborough, 21/6/1780. Nevertheless, the chairmen were voted a gift of £100 for their efforts during the riot by a grateful city corporation on June 27th (about 6/6d each): see J Jefferys to Lord Hillsborough, 1/7/1780.
92. Quoted by I R Christie, 'Henry Cruger and the End of Burke's Connection with Bristol', Transactions of the

of Dr Robert Watson, a Scottish adventurer who fought on the side of the Americans against the British before becoming Lord George's personal secretary. Watson believed that Gordon

> might have overturned the government and founded a constitution agreeable to the wishes and true interest of the people... Protestantism and Popery were, in Lord George's opinion, synonymous with Liberty and arbitrary power[93].

But he wrote this in 1795 and as a member of the London Corresponding Society. In 1798, Watson was to arrive in Bristol and attempt to organise democratical revolution there. John Noble was to be his implacable enemy.

Caldwell was pleasantly surprised by the non-appearance of Gordon rioters at Bristol where a disturbance had been 'expected', since he considered the city firmly in the grip of the Opposition. Here however, popular anti-catholicism was fortuitously transformed into hatred of England's French and American enemies by the swift action of the landlord of the Bush Inn who inspired an illumination to celebrate a timely naval victory. Caldwell was gratified:

> I must solemnly declare that Bristol is not the American or Opposition town which it was supposed to

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Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society, (1955), p.153.

93. Dr Robert Watson, The Life of Lord George Gordon with a Philosophical Review of his Political Conduct, (London 1795).

be - and that those who were in that interest seem very much changed[94].

But his relief was premature. When the eclipse of the North ministry in 1782 was followed shortly afterwards by both a naval victory against the French and an address from the throne on the need for economy, Bristol's Rockinghamite 'reformers' tried to appropriate patriotic celebrations. Their motion to send congratulations to the new ministry as an addenda to a loyal address from the inhabitants split a public meeting in the city and two addresses, one from each faction, had to be sent[95]. Again, an interest in parliamentary reform should not be inferred from the interest shown at Bristol in economic reform. The borough petitioned for the latter in 1780, but could not be roused to support Wyvillite calls for the former in 1783. Although it had been the intention of

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94. AL 1390, (MS letter), Caldwell to Hillsborough 11/6/1780, Bath Public Library. Disturbance was also averted by the eleventh hour conversion of Bristol's Catholic chapel to secular use: Bath Chronicle 22/6/1780. But see E C Black, The Association: British Extraparliamentary Political Organisation 1769-1793 (Harvard 1963), p.163, in which it is alleged that a minor disturbance did take place at Bristol.
95. Bath Chronicle 6/6/1782. The paper was adamant that 'no part of the late glorious victory falls to the share ofthat (Lord North's) ministry': 13/6/1782. For the political appropriation of naval victories in the name of patriotism see G Jordan & N Rogers, 'Admirals as Heroes: Patriotism and Liberty in Hanoverian England', Journal of British Studies (July 1989), pp.201-224. Rockingham's short ministry began in 1782 and ended a year later. Despite the presence in parliament since 1780 of Pitt and Sheridan, and in Rockingham's cabinet of Fox and Shelburne, 'It was an essentially aristocratic party which was ready to oppose the Court but had no desire to endorse popular sovereignty': H T Dickinson, Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth Century Britain, (London 1977), p.209.

a small faction within the Whig Union Club, who had set up a branch of the Society for Constitutional Information in 1782, to submit a large petition, men like Noble appeared satisfied with the weak gestures towards economy made by the Rockingham administration of 1782-3[96].

Particularly after the Gordon episode, the principle of extra-parliamentary association remained open to charges of conspiracy and unconstitutionalism. 'Let us not be alarmed at the thought of Associations, which are strictly legal and have many precedents to support them', counselled a plainly uncertain group of Wiltshire freemen. But an attempt to call a County Meeting to discuss reform floundered at Salisbury Assize when borough magistrates, jealously guarding their exclusive privileges, tipped the vote by 10-8. Other reformers were already rehearsing the defensive arguments over key conceptual issues that would dominate ideological debate in the 1790s. 'A Somersetshire Man' declared in 1783:

> It is no innovation in the present constitution for the people to desire equal representation; it is only reverting to its original principles from which, led by the hand of corruption, it has deviated[97].

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96. See J Cannon, Parliamentary Reform, p.88. Expectation of a swift end to the war had also been raised. In the event, it was over by the autumn of 1783. For the Bristol SCI, see E C Black, op cit., p.191.
97. Bath Chronicle 6/2/1783, 6/3/1783 & 27/3/1783. Somerset was one of only 12 Associated counties to submit reform petitions in 1783, less than half the number that had called for 'economic' reform in 1780: J Cannon, Parliamentary Reform, p.88.

A 'Small Freeholder', urged the county gentry to pursue a franchise that would include his 'middle class of freeholders... Shake off that servile dread of innovation which instead of emancipating will enthral you still further in the fetters of corruption'[98]. Charges of innovation centred not so much on the degree of moderation in the Association programme as on the tendency of county meetings to parody or replace parliamentary sovereignty. The memory of Lord George and his Protestant Associations was a stern enough warning of the risks of flirting with mass support for 'platform' politics. In this respect at least, argued Herbert Butterfield some years ago, the Wyvill movement entertained dangerous 'revolutionary' principles[99].

There is no evidence to suggest that it captured the imagination of the lower classes, or that many Associators were sympathetic to manhood suffrage. The fate and influence of the Bristol SCI after 1782 is uncertain. Yet some measure of plebeian support for independent politics may be assumed from the popularity of Henry Cruger at Bristol. In 1774, Cruger's Wilkesite 'Independent Society', with its platform of peace, religious liberty, economic reform and the abolition of contractors and placemen, had forged an uneasy alliance with Edmund Burke to secure election for the two of them

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98. Bath Chronicle 20/6/1782. The June meeting adopted the call for a freeholder franchise.
99. Herbert Butterfield, George III, Lord North and the People 1779-1780 (London 1949), p.vi.

at the expense of the two sitting members, Lord Clare and Mathew Brickdale[100]. Both Cruger and Burke were defeated in 1780, their brief alliance discarded in a damaging race for the Whig nomination, and Cruger suffered a further defeat in 1781. In 1784 however, Cruger successfully unseated the Tory alderman, George Daubeny, to energetic popular acclaim. A crowd carrying the 'banners and emblems of their trades and manufactories', launched a celebratory attack on Daubeny and Brickdale's headquarters, breaking the windows. Cruger, it should be remembered, was no revolutionary, nor even particularly radical by 1790s standards. Unless the crowd on this occasion was predominantly composed of freemen (which is quite possible in Bristol), they were not demonstrating for their own immediate interest[101].

Whatever the composition of the crowd, incidents of this kind only confirmed ruling class prejudices against extending the franchise to the 'swinish multitude', and set the tone for a lively debate during the mid 1780s over the propriety of educating them. Charity and Sunday Schools, it was suggested, 'might make them unfit for the

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100. The pattern of voting at this election, the first to be fought at Bristol on matters of principle for many years, is analysed by Elizabeth Baigent, Bristol Society in the Later Eighteenth Century (op cit.), esp. pp.325-7. She sees free trade rather than radicalism as the crucial factor in their success.
101. Bath Chronicle 13/5/1784. Cruger's radicalism was not evident in his parliamentary career. Daubeny accused him of creating new freeman voters through marriages of convenience, but his petition was rejected in 1786: Bath Journal 3/4/1786.

mean employments of their station by setting their minds above it'. Others demurred. Nothing, wrote a Bathonian advocate of 'a little' schooling, 'is more conducive to the prosperity of a state than a constant and quick succession from the lower to the higher ranks of the people'[102]. Major William Brooke, chairman of the Bath Sunday School Committee in 1789 advocated the provision of benches to accommodate poor children in the Abbey.

> Being thus mingled in one common conglomeration with their protectors and superiors, they no longer entertain the dispiriting suspicion that they are a distinct and rejected class of beings but stand in the same relation as the rest of mankind to the Universal Father of Heaven and Earth[103].

Fear of lower class disorder was a powerful weapon in the hands of the increasingly assertive middle orders; especially over the recurring issue of partial taxation. This was never more clearly demonstrated than in 1785 when the introduction of the Shop Tax precipitated a fierce and ultimately successful tradesman's campaign for its repeal, underlined by violent crowd action in London, the wholehearted support of several elite borough corporations, and the humiliating collapse of popular support for the architect of the tax, William Pitt[104].

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102. Bath Chronicle 17/2/1785.
103. William Brooke, Plans of the Sunday Schools and School of Industry Established in the City of Bath (Bath 1789).
104. This issue preoccupied the Bath Chronicle for many weeks: 16/6/1785, 23/6/1785, 7/7/1785, 14/7/1785, 4/8/1785, 18/8/1785 & 8/9/1785.

The campaign was a formative one in the creation of independent middling class organisation in the south west, giving rise to doggedly persistent and enduring 'shopkeepers committees' at Bristol and Bath[105]. Lower class support was courted with an assurance that 'the burden laid immediately upon the shopkeeper would fall ultimately on the consumer', despite the fact that many tradesmen's hostility to the tax was heightened by Pitt's failure to include measures to suppress hawkers and peddlers - clauses which would have fallen most heavily on the labouring poor[106]. Gripped by sudden amnesia over the 'terror' and outrage of the disturbances of 1780, the Chronicle played the disorder card for all it was worth as a lever against corrupt government. The London crowd who attacked Pitt's coach were blameless:

> an innocent and heedless rabble intent only upon expressing their contempt for his duplicity; but let him beware: the language of the people, though rough, is explicit and not the less expressive of their feelings from not being clothed in the gaudy and deceitful frippery of his own[107].

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105. Bath Chronicle 18/8/1785 & 8/9/1785; Bath Journal 23/1/1786..
106. Bath Chronicle 15/9/1785 & 16/6/1785.
107. Bath Chronicle 23/6/1785. Turning adversity into triumph, Pitt secured plaudits at Bradford on Avon in 1789 for his resistance to a Regency during the King's first serious illness. The cheering citizens of Bradford considered this a victory for the rights of parliament over the crown, but in fact it was a victory for Pitt over the Regent whose preference for Fox would not have been beneficial to Pitt's future. See Bath Journal 9/2/1789.

In the 1790s, fears that the rough 'language of the people' might be brought to bear upon privilege, property and hierarchy per se made it something of a hot potato, but newspaper endorsement survived at least in efforts to resist the government's laissez faire solutions to subsistence crises. But at all times, a clear distinction was drawn between the physical 'language of the people' and 'the spirited language of Englishmen resolved to maintain their rights', a vocabulary reserved for the exclusive use of the respectable middling classes (and in this case, the Bristol shopkeepers committee)[108].

After the failure of Pitt's reform bill in 1783, and the consequent collapse of Wyvill's Association movement, enthusiasm for reform was dampened until given fresh impetus by the centenary celebrations for the 'Glorious Revolution' in 1788, and by the early days of the revolution in France the following year. Many of the men who joined the reform movement at this time were to remain associated with it during the hostile years of the 1790s. This is particularly true of dissenters like John Bright, John Savery and Benjamin Hobhouse, prominent campaigners for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts between 1789 and 1790; later opponents of the Gagging Acts, and in Hobhouse's case even a parliamentary candidate in 1796. The Anglican-dominated County Association movement had rebuffed the overtures of Somerset's dissenters in 1783. Hobhouse, chairman of the

108. Bath Journal 23/1/1786.

Wiltshire Dissenters Committee in 1790, invoked religious toleration in revolutionary France and contrasted it with the loss of liberty in England, but he drew criticism from some:

> When the British Senate are directed to the French government for sentiments of civil and religious liberty, is there an Englishman but must drop a tear for the lost reputation of his country?

demanded one patriot[109]. A South Western delegates' meeting, called to send representatives to the London Assembly, became pre-occupied with issuing denials of intent. They were neither anti-anglican nor innovators, they insisted; and they had no more formed an 'alarming confederacy' than the County movement had in 1780[110]. Dissenters, writes J E Cookson, regarded the attack on their Committee movement in these years as the catalyst for the bullish popular Loyalism of the 1790s. Yet one suspects it was not dissent itself so much as the eulogising of French freedoms that created the climate for the 1791 Birmingham outrages[111].

A second group to take up reform at the end of the decade were the disenfranchised freemen of Bath. Their call for electoral reform in May 1789 was an extension of the hostility long felt towards the Corporation for the refusal of development rights on the 95-acre Walcot

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109. Bath Chronicle 25/2/1790.
110. Bath Chronicle 4/3/1790.
111. J E Cookson, The Friends of Peace: Anti-War Liberalism in England 1793-1815 (Cambridge 1982), pp.15-16.

commons. But despite an attempt to persuade a freeman to contest the parliamentary seat on the issue in 1790, the new campaign lacked vigour and quickly subsided into legal argument between solicitors over the commons issue alone[112]. Like the shopkeepers committee however, the freemen's campaign against a ruling oligarchy remained a significant step towards middling-class self-awareness.

The election of 1790 also re-invigorated the independent freemen of Bristol, disenfranchised not by disqualification but by the Whig and Tory tradition of uncontested elections. Recalling Cruger's platform of the late 1770s and early 1780s, the Rev Edward Barry revived the Independent Society of Freemen, attracted 1500 members and called for a candidate to step forward and break the mould. 'It was neither men nor party they assembled for', he rejoiced, 'but the CAUSE; to protect their common rights'. Unfortunately, the only man to present himself on their behalf was David Lewis, a man who 'though considered in general a well-disposed man... never failed to produce the most irresistible irony and laughter'. Lewis further annoyed Barry by declining the

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112. Bath Journal 4/5/1789 & 11/5/1789. The Commons belonged to the freemen and were sub-let as farmland. The rent derived from them was a fraction of the potential should the site be improved and built over. In March 1789, a number of disgruntled freemen petitioned parliament against the Bath Improvement Bill - essentially a charter for further capital investment by the Corporation in the city's development. Many freemen had long believed that the Corporation's opposition to developing the commons was driven by a monopolistic desire to close down competition. Bath Journal 23/3/1789.

poll five hours after it opened and blaming the Society for 'deserting' him[113].

In the 1780s then, ideas about challenging certain inequalities in the electoral system gained currency both inside and outside parliament. The primary concern of those social groups at the centre of this movement was not the right of full representation through a wide franchise however, but the control of public expenditure by placing a check upon the power of the Crown. Mass popular involvement was neither evident nor encouraged. It was to take the debate over the French Revolution and the panegyrics it threw up - particularly Paine's Rights of Man between 1791 and 1792 - to produce that. What we do see in the 1780s are formative steps towards the creation of a middling class critique of oligarchy. The development of middling class self-awareness was not altogether arrested by the polarisation of 'loyalist' and 'jacobin' politics in the 1790s, but it would largely turn its face from association with reform. Indeed, it was the fiercely reactionary and francophobic Reeves movement rather than the reform societies that fully realised the potential strength of 'platform' politics in the 1790s. Drawing his inspiration more from the results of Lord George's agitation than the Rev. Wyvill's, John

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113. Rev E Barry, Coalitions and Compromises (Bristol 1790); and Genuine Letters and other Official Papers from the Original Manuscripts of the Independent Society of Freemen (Bristol 1790).

Reeves emerged as the most consummate manipulator of popular fears and bigotry of the eighteenth century.

Chapter Two

Radicalism

Radicalism in the Somerset, Wiltshire and Bristol region has previously been poorly documented. A primary task of this chapter therefore is to trace its development, assess its strength and to clarify to some extent what is meant by it. Radicalism, after all, is largely an invention of the nineteenth century. Eighteenth century reformers in the South West did not refer to themselves as 'radicals', and many would have rejected the term for its adventurist or innovative connotations. 'Jacobin' was a derogatory term, defined and introduced in the English context by the opponents of reform who sought to exploit linkage with French terror. English reformers did not necessarily shy away from it (Thelwall and Coleridge both used it), but it was not a term of their own choosing. John Reeves saw his ideological enemies as 'republicans and levellers' but few were either (assuming Reeves' understanding of levelling as a social and not just a political phenomenon)[1]. I have defined radicalism in this

1. A leveller, according to a dictionary of 1813, was 'one who destroys superiority, one who endeavours to bring all to the same state of equality', quoted in

thesis as the movement for the reform of parliament not just by a widening of the franchise but by universal suffrage. This criteria by no means accurately describes every reformer who became associated with the radical clubs, and the political legacy of the reformers of the 1790s was (and sometimes still is) fought over and re-defined by political adversaries in the following century. Under Tory rule in 1837 for example, newly enfranchised middle class supporters of the Whig post-Reform Act ministry erected a public monument to the Scottish 'martyrs' (Muir, Gerrald, Margarot, Palmer and Skirving), transported for sedition by 'rancorous Tory persecutors' in 1794. The martyrs, it was said, were punished for advocating 'by constitutional means, a reform in the representation of the people... which has, in our time, been triumphantly carried into effect'[2]. Quite what Maurice Margarot and his universal suffragist companions would have made of this political opportunism cannot be stated with certainty, but it remains an interesting example of the ease with which 'dangerous jacobins' might be rehabilitated as Friends of the People. The nature of radical philosophy is given further consideration in chapter four.

F K Donnelly, 'Levellerism in Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century Britain', Albion, 20, 2 (1988), p.265.

2. Lord Cockburn, An Examination of the Trials for Sedition which have Hitherto Occurred in Scotland (Edinburgh 1888), Appendix, pp.247-8.

As I demonstrated in chapter one, historians have assumed that radicalism in the region was weak and ineffective. This assumption rests principally upon the recorded statements of hostile contemporaries and their amplification by early chroniclers. In December 1792 for example, Home Secretary Henry Dundas circulated a request to all provincial authorities for an assessment of the strength of radical opinion outside the capital. This initiative, taken seven months after the Royal Proclamation against sedition and at the peak of Reeves Association movement influence, drew this response from the Lord Lieutenant of Somerset before he had even received replies to all of his enquiries:

> The number of seditious persons, if there are any, is so small as to be by no means an object of the smallest apprehension or danger and that whatever attempts have been made... they have totally failed in their effect and that the most perfect tranquility and loyalty pervade every part of this county[3].

How reliable are declarations of this kind? To test them in a particular locality, this chapter begins by investigating early radical politics at Bristol and the public attitudes adopted towards it by the local administration. The following sections deal with early radicalism outside Bristol, the distinction between types of radicalism; and later developments from English and Irish insurrectionism to the effects of scarcity in 1800-

3. HO 42/24, Earl Poulett to Dundas 16/1/1793.

01. The narrative quality of much of this chapter is a symptom of the need to establish the facts about the radical presence. Without it, the assumed hegemony of loyalism is meaningless.

Corporation Quietism: Disorder and Civic Pride in Bristol 1791-1794.

Following an address from the Grand Jury in April 1793, Richard Burke, brother of Edmund and Recorder of Bristol, filed a similar declaration to that made by Poulett. In Bristol, he emphasised, any 'attempts' had been

> ineffectual... and we rejoice in the general disposition of the inhabitants which has left us nothing out of the usual course to present[4].

A year later, James Morgan, the mayor of Bristol assured Dundas he had still 'not received any information of the existence of any such (radical) societies... in this city'[5]. These statements are important because they have been repeated by historians with such tautological certainty in succeeding years that the virtual absence of radicalism in the South West in the 1790s has often been taken for granted. In the case of Bristol, the process begun by such early and influential chroniclers as Samuel Seyer has been continued so unquestioningly into the present that Mark Harrison has stated, 'There was little

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4. Bristol Quarter Session and Assize Papers, May 1792-March 1793, contained in the 'Address of the Grand Jury' at the April sessions, 1793, Bristol City Record Office.
5. Bristol Corporation Letter Book, Morgan to Dundas 21/5/1794, Bristol City Record Office.

interest in radical politics' and 'Radicalism was spectacularly absent from Bristol in these years'[6]. Muriel Vlaeminke confidently reveals that 'Of all the major British cities, Bristol was the least involved in radical protest movements'. Although she attributes this to 'a total absence of references', she is dismissive of those references she has found. The Bristol Constitutional Society was 'never more than a small minority group... hardly a notable contribution to the British radical movement'. When the evidence does not fit her analysis, as when the Society claimed steady growth in 1794, she dismisses it as 'sheer bravado'[7]. It is not so much that Harrison and Vlaeminke are wrong that concerns me at this stage, as that they offer no tangible evidence that they are right. The survival of such views depends principally on the veracity of Burke and Morgan's denials, and on the absence of contradictory empirical evidence.

The Home Office correspondence files hold very few letters from the civil power at Bristol during the 1790s. The reconstruction and assessment of radicalism in other regions and towns has often depended largely on this source. But Bristol's keenly-felt status as a prosperous trading port and as an independent county encouraged the

6. Samuel Seyer, Notes for a Topographical History of Bristol (MS, n.d.), p.246, Bristol City Library. Mark Harrison, Crowds and History: Mass Phenomena in English Towns 1790-1835, pp.239-40 & 274.
7. M. Vlaeminke, Bristol During the French Revolutionary War, 1793-1802 (M Litt thesis, Bristol 1984), pp.102 and 111.

fostering of a socially-inclusive civic culture of self-identity and pride. There is evidence to suggest that the dissenter-dominated Common Council adopted a policy of quiet introspection during the 1790s, rather than risk surrendering local sovereignty to Whitehall or drawing attention to themselves as dissenters at a time when dissent and radicalism were linked in the popular consciousness. Discomfort at the linkage between (Anglican) Church and King implicit in the rhetoric of the Reeves movement may have contributed to the Corporation's unwillingness to initiate the formation of an Association in the city in 1792-3[8]. This unwillingness was almost certainly founded also in the Corporation's belief that it could promote anti-jacobinism in the city perfectly well without the intrusion of a vulgar campaign of national populism. Bristol was apparently the only major city not to form a Reeves Association. 'Surely', reasoned a dissatisfied correspondent of Felix Farleys Bristol Journal,

> a city with so much consequence both for riches and number of inhabitants as Bristol will not be backward in showing that spirit...[9],

while the Duke of Brunswick lamented, 'I very much regret we have no Association here'[10]. But in the following days separate loyalist meetings were convened at the Guildhall

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8. The Corporation formed no Reeves Association, but correspondents from outside the city still addressed mayor Bengough as though he were 'Chairman of the Association': Corporation Letter Box, James Funnel to Bengough (London), 7/1/1793, 1792 box, bundle 29.
9. Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 8/12/1792
10. BL Add Ms 16,927, Brunswick to Moore 5/12/1792

of the Common Council (December 12th) and of the Mayor, Aldermen and Inhabitants (December 13th) for the passing of resolutions similar to those adopted by every Reeves Association at its formative gathering. The Corporation displayed more subsequent interest in the development of the Somerset Coal Canal than in Reevesism however. There was a loyal address from the Union Society of Carpenters and an attempt to establish an Association at the adjacent parish of Clifton, but the newspapers were silent about its progress. Throughout the winter, calls for a Bristol RA to be formed continued. In one man's view, it was the only way to ensure party and religious unity in the struggle against jacobinism. Although he did not consider the present condition of Bristolian radicalism a substantial threat, 'this should not put us off our guard... let us be watchful and vigilant'. At the end of January 1793, eighty-one frustrated loyalists established a Church and King club, the True Briton Society, but nothing was heard of it afterwards[11]. The reticence of the Corporation to supply leadership appears to have hampered the development of loyalist organisation in Bristol. Such reticence may, as Morgan and Burke were to imply, have been a consequence of public apathy about reform. But a glance at the behaviour of the Corporation in other circumstances at about this time suggests a less straightforward interpretation.

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11. Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 15/12/1792, 22/12/1792, 12/1/1793, 2/2/1793.

The Corporation had also kept their heads down in 1791 when, following the anti-radical/dissenting Priestley riots at Birmingham and in the light of rumours that Wesley had been invited to preach in Bristol by the Corporation, the London Evening Mail harboured 'serious apprehensions' of disorder there[12]. John Harris, the mayor of Bristol, had in fact received five anonymous letters in July, threatening the mobilisation of up to 5000 'good heroes' and the destruction of every dissenting chapel in the city as well as his own official residence[13], and he informed the Home Office on July 21st. He was anxious to play down the seriousness of the threat and expressly asked Dundas not to reproduce the text of the letters in the London Gazette or offer the usual rewards for the capture of the authors for,

> an idea going abroad of the apprehension of a disturbance might excite in the common people a disposition to do that which it is both our inclination and duty to prevent[14].

Dundas was only told about these threats at all, it seems, because the mayor thought it prudent to request troops to stand by in readiness. The third regiment of infantry was accordingly ordered west from Reading but held no nearer than Devizes in accordance with the mayor's wish not to use them unless it became essential. But from within the Corporation, voices were raised

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12. Evening Mail 1-3/8/1791.
13. These are preserved in the Corporation Letter Box 1791, bundle 27, Bristol City Record Office.
14. HO 42/19, John Harris to Dundas 21/7/1791.

against Harris for his unnecessary adventurism in alerting central government at all. Alderman George Daubeny voiced his concern to Evan Nepean. Troops should not have been requested, he wrote, and the mayor's insistence on using the city constables instead was equally dangerous if the constables had been briefed to expect disorder. He was, he assured Nepean, doing his best to allay any fears the constables may have been given by telling them the magistrates doubted the likelihood of rioting.

> If any (tumult) should arise, it is my real opinion that it will be produced in consequence of the attention of the multitude being excited by the means taken to prevent it[15].

In Daubeny's view, even the existence of his letter was a potential hazard, so he requested Nepean to destroy it. There was no consequent major disturbance at Bristol, but the maintenance of complete tranquillity is in doubt because of Harris's admission of a few 'unpleasant' incidents which, nevertheless, he opted not to trouble central government with[16].

John Harris was succeeded as mayor by John Noble in the autumn of 1791. When Bristol experienced a wave of industrial disputes the following summer, George Munro, military commander of the district, was critical of the county magistrates and of the Corporation for taking

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15. HO 42/19, George Daubeny to Nepean 25/7/1791.
16. HO 42/19, Harris to Nepean 25/7/1791.

insufficient action to break combinations. Noble responded by advising Dundas that military aid might be needed to police the city, but

> to prevent any confusion from the report of the military aid being requested, I write this letter in the most private manner and I earnestly request it may be as private in your office[17].

Noble was anxious to prevent the recurrence of arguments within the Corporation over the issue of enlisting outside help to solve parochial problems, and of exacerbating unrest by over-dramatising the threat.

Dundas's circular letter requesting information about jacobinism arrived at Bristol during the mayoralty of Henry Bengough. His was the administration which declined to establish a Reeves Association in December 1792, and which was to adopt an introspective attitude once again in January 1793. In that month, the mayor of Liverpool, Bristol's principal rival (after London) as a trading port, forwarded to Bengough a copy of an anonymous threatening letter he had received and asked whether anything similar had been received at Bristol. Neither his letter or its enclosure have survived, but Bengough's reply suggests it concerned a threat to disrupt commerce and perhaps shipping in both cities, and that it had been originally sent from Bath. Bengough ordered a tightening of security on Bristol quay and told night-watchmen to be

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17. Corporation Letter Book, John Noble to Dundas 13/8/1792; HO 42/21, George Munro to Dundas 9/8/1792

'vigilant against the execution of similar designs so exceedingly mischievous and diabolical'. He informed the mayor of Liverpool that

> no anonymous or other information of the nature... sent to you has been transmitted to this city either from Bath or elsewhere[18].

But this does not appear to have been true. A margin-note in the Corporation Letter Book links the Liverpool letter with an anonymous note Bengough received in December 1792 (now lost). He had sent a copy of this note to Dundas only a week before the arrival of the letter from Liverpool, confirming Corporation policy once again by entreating Dundas not to reprint the text in the Gazette and to offer no reward but to leave the matter in the hands of the civil power. In fact, Dundas took no action at all since 'so much time had elapsed' between its receipt at Bristol and Bengough's decision to forward it to Whitehall[19].

The magistrate's decision to use troops to disperse a crowd demonstrating against a broken agreement to abandon tolls on Bristol bridge in September 1793 resulted in an uncertain number of deaths from musket ball[20]. Responsibility for this tragedy was to haunt the Corporation for many years and it did much to confirm the

18. Corporation Letter Book, Henry Bengough to Mayor of Liverpool, 16/1/1793.
19. Corporation Letter Book, Bengough to Dundas 7/1/1793; and see Corporation Letter Box 1792, bundle 23, Dundas to Bengough 7/1/1793 for the reply.
20. The figure was in the region of sixty-three. See Mark Harrison, op cit., p.274.

popular belief that disputes in the city were best settled by the civil power acting alone. Mayor James Morgan neglected to send an immediate report of the incident to the Home Office and Dundas claimed that he was having to rely upon London street gossip for news of events at Bristol:

> I could have wished that you had sent me the earliest intelligence of the extent of (the riots) and of the measures which have been taken to oppose them in order that I might have been able to form a judgement of the real situation of your town.

But Morgan replied with only the sketchiest explanation of events and assured Dundas that the civil power had the situation entirely under control[21].

It is uncertain whether Dundas's circular letter on radical societies was responded to by the Bengough administration. The tight-lipped attitude of the Bristol authorities had previously been noted in Whitehall however, since most large towns had already volunteered such information to the Home Office long before they were asked for it. Dundas had pointed this omission out to Noble in August 1792, but there is no evidence that a reply was sent. Thomas Mudge, a London solicitor, was sent to the West of England by Dundas in December with instructions to supply the missing information, but

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21. HO 42/26, Dundas to Morgan ?/10/1793, and Morgan to Dundas 7/10/1793.

unfortunately his report has not survived[22]. Apart from Burke's 'Grand Jury Address' of 1793, we have only mayor James Morgan's letter to Dundas of May 1794 (quoted above) to go on, and in which it is claimed there were no radical societies in the city. The tendency of the Bristol authorities to underplay the scale of unrest in the city in any official communications must call the reliability of these contemporary assessments into question. Two questions need to be answered. Were radical societies active in Bristol before the summer of 1794; and if so, were the city authorities aware of the fact?

Evidence of at least one, and possibly two radical organisations is not hard to find. The Annual Register records the formation of a Corresponding Society at Bristol in 1792, before the founding of the Reeves movement[23], and by December at least one bookseller (Samuel Johnson of Clare St) was promoting and selling copies of Rights of Man for 6d:

> Not withstanding His Majesty's loyal proclamation and the late circular letter, his windows continue filled with inflammatory publications, the most impudent caricature prints, heads of the principle disturbers of our country etc.[24].

A report from the government spy, Lynam, confirms that the London Corresponding Society (LCS) were in receipt of

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22. HO 42/21, Dundas to Noble ?/8/1792; HO 42/23, Mudge to Dundas 8/12/1792.
23. Annual Register 1792, II, (1821 edition), p.153
24. BL Add Ms 16927, Brunswick to Moore 5/12/1792.

a letter from 'a new society formed at Bristol' in November 1793 and an entry in the LCS Journal shows that a Bristol society had been in contact at the end of October[25]. A body describing itself as the Bristol Society for Constitutional Information in January 1794 was 'reassembled' as the Bristol Constitutional Society in April and a manifesto 'Address' was published. Two letters from them survive in the appendix to the Second Report of the Committee of Secrecy[26], the first of which appears to be identical to one described by another government spy, John Taylor, as being from the Bristol Corresponding Society[27]. Despite opposition, the Bristol radicals claimed their numbers were steadily increasing and they offered to organise a national delegate conference in the city in April 1794 'to consider the measures to be adopted... preparatory to a General Convention'. I can find no record of such a conference taking place, but it was certainly endorsed at a northern delegate meeting in Halifax[28].

The possibility that the mayor of Bristol was unaware of the society's existence some eighteen months after it had been formed is a remote one. The printed '<u>Address to the People of Great Britain</u>' was known to have reached the

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25. <u>BL Add Ms 27812</u> (Place Collection), LCS Journal 31/10/1793; <u>TS11/958/3503</u>, report from Lynam dated 5/11/1793.
26. <u>Second Report of the Committee of Secrecy</u> (London 1794).
27. <u>TS11/955/3499</u>, report of John Taylor dated 3/2/1794.
28. See letter from Sheffield Constitutional Society in appendix to <u>Second Report...</u> (op cit).

attention of the society's 'enemies' by April 24th[29], and a copy was certainly sent by someone to the Treasury Solicitor's office for legal opinion on its 'seditious' content[30]. Morgan and his magistrates may not actually have sent it, but it beggars belief that, in the absence of any official Reeves Association in the city, they had not even been consulted. Bengough had made little of the anonymous threats to the city's dockyards in January 1793, but these could have been taken as further evidence of radical disaffection. A month earlier there had been fears in some circles that radicals in the capital were plotting insurrection and the firing of London's dockyards. In Bristol itself, dockyard arson had been an especially emotive subject since an incident in 1777 when the newly enlarged docks were fired by a pro-American republican, James Aitken (John the Painter). With three ships blazing, another seriously damaged and six quayside warehouses gutted, panic had gripped the city's merchant classes until 'the town had the appearance of a siege and people were frightened out of their senses'. Nor had John the Painter been forgotten by 1793. In fact, he was indelibly etched into the collective folk memory of the city, and his name commemorated in a stone corbel on one warehouse, lit up during a loyalist illumination in 1789[31]. In fact, just as Bengough was dealing with the

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29. See letter dated 24/4/1794 in Second Report...
30. See copy in TS24/2/13.
31. For John the Painter see John Latimer, Annals of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century (Bristol 1893), pp.427-8; J Evans, A Chronological Outline of the History of Bristol (Bristol 1824), pp.292-3; and

anonymous threats of 1793, the Bath Register evoked the Painter's name once again by comparing him to Thomas Paine:

> What language, miscreant, can thy vileness paint?
> To thee, e'en John the Painter was a saint
> Thou should'st be hanged on gallows ten times higher.
> He but burned ships - thoud'st set the world on fire[32].

Bengough's decision to keep the threatening letter quiet rather than raise a public outcry against some proposed republican insurrection contrasts significantly with the attitude of many other provincial authorities and Reeves Associations, but is very much in keeping with the traditional response of Bristol Corporation. One thing Bengough did not want to risk was an economically damaging local panic in the city's commercial centre. The Corporation maintained this policy throughout the troubled year of 1792 when, as John Noble revealed in September, his mayoralty had been studded with 'handbills, paragraphs, anonymous threatenings and incendiary letters'. These had not previously been reported he said, because they were 'beneath his notice' and clearly the work of a minority[33].

James Aitken, The Life of James Aitken, Commonly Called John the Painter, an Incendiary (London 1777).
32. Bath Register 19/1/1793.
33. Sarah Farleys Bristol Journal 6/10/1792.

Noble's over-developed sense of civic pride had caught the attention of political satirists at Bristol in 1792. Lampooned for an expedition to London in which he had claimed his ancient right as mayor of Bristol to a seat at the Court of Admiralty, and mocked because he had only become mayor by default when Mathew Brickdale declined the honour, John Noble had become a figure of fun amongst critics of Bristol's merchant culture. In an obscure joke, the Bath Register reported his chairmanship of an LCS meeting in 1793. The meeting in question had actually been chaired by a man named Martin because another man, Parkinson, had declined the honour and the Register was satirising not only Noble's route to the mayoralty, but even his professed staunch loyalism - which had already been interpreted elsewhere as a cynical cover for self-agrandisement[34].

Morgan's denial of radicalism also contrasted strangely with statements he made about the suspected cause of the Bristol Bridge riot in 1793. Mark Harrison may well be correct to portray such claims as a desperate attempt by the civil power to legitimise their over-reaction[35], but this is not the point. What it shows is that Morgan was quite prepared to face in several directions at once and to tell Whitehall whatever it suited him to tell them at

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34. Bath Register 7/9/1793. For the circumstances at the LCS meeting see Mary Thale (ed), Selections from the Papers of the London Corresponding Society 1792-1799, (Cambridge 1983) p.81; and for another comment on Noble's loyalism see the anonymous pamphlet, Speech of Balaam's Beast (Bristol 1792).
35. Mark Harrison, op cit., pp.281-2.

PAGE NUMBERING AS ORIGINAL

lie quietly is absolutely typical of Corporation practice.

It can be established then that radical activity may have been underestimated by previous historians of Bristol; that the Corporation harboured attitudes towards publicising the radical presence that were markedly different to those of most provincial authorities; that successive mayors played down what they knew, and were unlikely to take the legal action against radical societies which central government had asked them to. The weakness of radical organisation at Bristol in the 1790s is therefore much less clear than has previously been supposed and certainly cannot be assessed from the testimony of its opponents.

The Early Developments outside Bristol

As will be made clear by the following chapter, the attitudes of the authorities and the presence of a Reeves Association at Bath made that city's response to radicalism very different to Bristol's. Consequently, Bath's radicals are more visible to twentieth century enquiry. The Bath Society to Promote a Reform of Parliament and a More Equal Representation of the People was formed in November 1792 by gentlemen from the Whiggish Revolution Society (formed the previous year). By the beginning of 1793, this probably rather exclusive

body became the Bath Constitutional Society under the chairmanship of the leading dissenter, Benjamin Hobhouse and a correspondence was begun with 'such other societies as are instituted for the same purpose'. 'A society' at Bath was in contact with the LCS at this time[39]. An attempt was made to engage the Bath Reeves Association in open debate in December 1792[40], but radical societies kept a lower profile after this as men suspected of jacobinism were evicted from jobs at the Theatre and Catch Club, demands were made for members of the Constitutional Society to be publicly exposed, and public informing and denunciation became highly fashionable[41]. In May 1794, the publisher John Campbell was identified by an anonymous government informer as a convener of weekly Corresponding Society meetings. This man had been

> affixing to his shop window and door manuscript information of every article of intelligence that appears adverse and offering every seditious inflammatory publication that comes out... in defiance of the magistrates he has sold great numbers of Payne's Rights of Man[42].

James Morgan may have been unable to identify any radical activity in his own city, but he knew all about the 'Club

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39. Bath Chronicle 10/11/1791, 15/11/1792, 10/1/1793, 7/2/1793; M Thale, op cit., pp.43, 49, & 53.
40. BL Add Ms 16921, Derham and Stroud to Moore, 8/12/1792. The debate was prevented by the Association.
41. Bath Chronicle 4/1/1794, 7/2/1793; Bath Journal 6/1/1794, 24/2/1794; The Times 8/1/1794. These denunciations are discussed fully in the section on loyalism, below.
42. HO 42/30, anon to Dundas 12/5/1794.

of the Jacobins' at Bath, and its connections with disaffected Frenchmen[43]. Henry Harington, mayor of Bath and an enthusiastic opponent of radicalism, was also suspicious of Frenchmen in his city, especially during the winter of 1793-4 when

> the French Republic manifesto has been most industriously dispersed in this place for some time past and I have also heard of a handbill exciting the people to submit themselves to the expected French as their Reformers of all Grievance[44].

Elsewhere, evidence of radicalism is more patchy. A society commemorating the French Revolution was established at Taunton by some 'gentlemen' in July 1791[45] and reformers were still prominent enough in the town to attract the attention of the Church and King mob which broke their windows and battled with constables in 1792[46]; 'levellers' were 'very busy in distributing scraps of Paine's works' at Trowbridge in 1792, while at Bradford on Avon 'a society' was believed to be inciting soldiers to disaffection so that radical politics were 'the constant topic of every alehouse in which they are quartered'[47]. A Bradford weaver and pamphleteer referred to as 'Jemmy Jumps, the Clothing Boy' was accused of

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43. HO 42/28, Morgan to Dundas 6/1/1794.
44. HO 42/28, Harington to Dundas 9/2/1794.
45. Bath Chronicle 20/7/1791.
46. John Caulfield, The Reeves Association: A Study of Loyalism in the 1790s (Ph.D thesis, Reading 1988), p.132.
47. HO 42/23, Craufurd to Dundas 20/12/1792; HO 42/24, Craufurd to Dundas 22/1/1793.

attending 'republican' meetings at Trowbridge in 1792[48]. One anonymous informer believed the south west 'abounds with societies of this kind' in 1794, and that a corresponding society at Bridgwater, supported by 'men of property', was in the habit of meeting every night until two in the morning[49]. Lord Lieutenant Poulett's dismissive remarks about radical clubs, made in his report to Dundas in January 1793, begin to look a less reliable source for assessment.

Surviving documents relating to the composition, strength and concerns of these clubs in the early 1790s are few and far between. However, the declaration of war between England and France in February 1793 may effectively have set the agenda for radical discussion for months to come; the 'Patriotic society' at Bath publishing and distributing 5000 copies of the LCS 'Address to the Nation' in September for example. This pamphlet urged the King to seek an early end to the 'ruinous and disgraceful war'[50]. Setting himself against the many patriotic eulogies that greeted news of the British 'success' at Linselles on August 18th, John Campbell published two poems emphasising its horrific waste. Fallen British soldiers had died 'in mad obedience to the vile decree / Of wild ambition or proud Tyranny'[51], like moths

48. Bath Herald 12/1/1793. This may have been a derogatory reference to Benjamin Hobhouse.
49. HO 42/32, Anon to Dundas 4/6/1794.
50. M Thale, op cit., pp.75, 81 & 82.
51. 'The Field of Battle', published by the Bath Register, 24/8/1794. The paper, which had once shown radical sympathies when Campbell himself had been its

attracted to a flame, 'tortured, tumbling on the table'[52]. At Bristol, a hostile atmosphere of 'strong prejudices' had caused the Constitutional Society to consider disbanding during 1793[53], and its programme prior to rejuvenation in April 1794 when its 'Address' was published is impossible to discover. The society was probably made numerically weak by repressive interference.

The inception and methods of the Association movement appear to have stunted the development of radicalism as a popular movement between 1792 and 1794. It is clear however that a radical nucleus survived repression in both towns and emerged back into public view during 1794 after public interest in Reevesite loyalism had died back. An anti-war delegation who clashed with loyalists at a Bristol public meeting in 1795 for example, were said by one paper to have outnumbered their opponents[54]. Equally, by the end of that year, Coleridge's radical journal, The Watchman, had secured 370 Bristol subscribers, and a petition from the city opposing the Gagging Acts attracted about 4000 signatures[55]. The

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publisher, expressed no sympathy for his views. The action at Linselles was rather 'the most glorious that has been achieved by the British this campaign'.

52. 'The Moths', Bath Register 7/9/1793.
53. Letter to the LCS dated 24/4/1794, reprinted in the appendix of the Second Report....
54. The Star (London) 20/11/1795. It is accepted however that the movement against the war had greater support even then than the campaign for parliamentary reform.
55. L Patten (ed), The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. II. The Watchman (Cambridge 1970), p.xliv; and ibid. I. Lectures 1795 on Politics and Religion (Cambridge 1971), p.366.

failure of informal repressive measures to obliterate radicalism meant that antagonistic local authorities were obliged after 1793 to rely more heavily upon legal restraints. At Bristol, where the civil power was unlikely to intervene, this meant the virtual disappearance of the issue from public record. At Bath, where magistrates displayed considerable dedication to the legal harassment of jacobins, the very opposite was to be the case. Many trials for the use or publication of seditious words offered no conclusive evidence that the accused were involved with radical clubs, but some cases do indicate the survival of a radical political culture beneath the surface of everyday society. The fact that both legal and unofficial repression prevented the open display of this culture may explain the scarcity of surviving documentation. We would never, for example, have known that copies of Rights of Man were still being circulated privately and surreptitiously, pressed from hand to hand under the very noses of the Bath authorities a month after John Campbell had been forced out of the city by bankruptcy, if the tailor Benjamin Bull had not been informed against for doing just that in Bath Market Place in August 1794. It is clear from the consequent case notes that Bull belonged to a local radical society about which the magistrates hoped to learn more but could not because Bull refused to reveal further names and details. The prevention of Corresponding Society meetings above Campbell's shop would appear, therefore, to have forced a more clandestine mode of organisation upon the

members, but not to have obliterated all resistance[56]. Similarly, the apprehension at Kingweston, Somerset in 1794 of two London journeymen, Thomas Meekins and Thomas Stone, for allegedly enticing disaffected rural labourers into a secret organisation to assist a French landing, obscures far more than it reveals. If an attempt was really being made to raise insurrectionary cells in the countryside as early as 1794, it pre-dates all previous evidence. The two suspects were aquitted of sedition at the following county assize, and certain aspects of the prosecution case were somewhat imaginitive (the interpretation by one magistrate of the initials 'JB' inside Meekins' knapsack as 'Jacobin Brotherhood' for example!). That Meekins and Stone were working for the French may have been an exaggerated charge, but the evidence nevertheless suggests that they were recruiting Somerset men into an organisation of some sort. A witness claimed they had asked him to join a secret republican society and entered his name into a pocket book. An examining magistrate found the book but regretted that it could not be produced in evidence because Meekins had removed pages and 'defaced' it whilst in custody. The men were alleged to have links with both the LCS and the Sheffield Corresponding Society[57].

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56. See indictment drawn up for the case against Bull in the Philip George Papers, Bath Guildhall Record Office, notes in TS11/506 and Bath Chronicle 18/8/1794. For Campbell's bankruptcy see advert for the sale of his effects in Bath Herald 12/7/1794.
57. Documentation survives in HO 40/31, Granville to Dundas, 22/6/1794 and Bath Chronicle 3/7/1794 & 10/7/1794.

A broader base: liberty, war and the critique of commerce 1794-1797.

Although the Bristol Constitutional Society may not have been as direct a beneficiary of the Bridge riot as Burke, Noble and Morgan feared it would be, a second and more influential circle of discontents rose to prominence in its wake. This group, which centred around the poet Coleridge, his fellow pantisocrat George Lovell, and two doctors of medicine, Thomas Beddoes and Edward Long Fox, developed a critique of local politics which tended to equate Bristol's commercial tradition with vulgarity, greed and corruption, and corruption with the illiberal infringement of English liberties guaranteed by the 1689 Bill of Rights. Rarely committed to parliamentary reform, these men were more concerned about the incompetence of the exclusive Corporation on a local level; and on a national level, the illegitimacy of Pitt's attacks on free speech and assembly amidst the economic hardship brought about by a morally questionable war. Beddoes for example saw the continuation of the war rather than the unrepresentative nature of the legislature as the greatest threat to social cohesion, and Pitt's 'mal-administration' of the war as the rationale behind the Gagging Acts: 'If his plans will not bear discussion, he will seal up the mouth of the People'[58]. For Beddoes, the

58. 'It would be in peace which soothes, not in war which irritates, to render property, were it threatened, safe from the hazard of forcible

government's insistence that the Corresponding Societies were seditious was merely a smokescreen to divert attention from its own incompetence. But unless the war and the repression of the radical societies was ended, it was argued, internal disorder was inevitable. As the merchant Azariah Pinney put it,

> I dread the consequences - the murmurs of the People will for a time be suppressed by the military forces, but whenever circumstances shall favour resistance, their complaints will burst forth with the whirlwind's fury[59].

Supporters of this circle were not therefore directly connected to the radical reform clubs[60], and they represented a second strand in popular opposition politics at Bristol. This was a point understood by Coleridge who was exceptional in identifying himself with the aims of both. The prospectus for his journal, The Watchman in 1796 made public an intention to co-operate with the Whig Club (against the Gagging Acts) as well as

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division': Thomas Beddoes, Where Would be the Harm of a Speedy Peace? (Bristol 1795).

59. Pinney Family Letter Book 1795-6, A Pinney to William Wordsworth 26/11/1795, Bristol University Library (Special Collections).

60. See for example, Coleridge's denial of membership, (below) which was echoed by Southey (same source) and John Rose who claimed to be 'connected with no other political society than the People of this kingdom': John Rose, Letters to the Rt Hon Charles Bragge MP (Bristol 1810). Beddoes' interest in parliamentary reform may have run no further than the abolition of placemen, pensions and sinecures. In August 1792 he referred to the French Directory as 'this infernal club of jacobins with its mad mob': D A Stansfield, Thomas Beddoes: Chemist, Physician, Democrat (Lancaster 1984), pp.73 & 75.

the 'Patriotic societies' (to obtain a 'right of suffrage general and frequent')[61]. As a group, the Coleridge circle, no less than the repressive policies of pro-government loyalists, represented a propertied class reaction to popular disorder - particularly during the severe provision scarcity of 1795-6.

The distaste felt by this literary and scientific circle for the Bristolian culture of progress through commerce was rooted in fashionable Enlightenment thinking about the quality of life, or as Beddoes put it, the conviction that 'a sense of justice and not the spirit of commerce is to tranquillise the dissensions of mankind'[62]. The flavour of their objection is given most graphically in Robert Lovell's poem of 1794, 'Bristol, a Satire'; a cynical riposte to Romaine Joseph Thorn's eulogy to local endeavour, 'Bristolia; a Poem', published that same year. Lovell considered the city's obsession with wealth creation 'sordid' and unprincipled since it marginalised charitable ventures like the city infirmary (left unfinished during the slump of 1793) and obstructed the abolition of slaving. The 'self-elected' Corporation and justices, obsessed by 'the name, the important air / the

61. Reprinted in L Patton (ed), The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, II, 'The Watchman' (Cambridge 1970). The sympathetic merchant Azariah Pinney once described the group as 'Coleridge's party'. Beddoes, who bridged the divide between medicine and poetry, was a capable pamphleteer but 'no orator': Pinney Family Letter Book 1795-6, A Pinney to William Wordsworth 26/11/1795, Bristol University Library (Special Collections).
62. Quoted in D A Stansfield, Thomas Beddoes: Chemist, Physician, Democrat (Lancaster 1984), p.117.

fur-clad gown and magisterial chair' were concerned only with 'the right and privilege of doing wrong'. Lovell took an equally ungenerous view of the 'citizens', whose recent outcry at the Corporation's intention to build a new 'Bastille' was 'Not to guard Freedom, but to save expense':

> Oh! Save their pockets and they ask no more...
> Oppress them, starve them, murder if you will,
> Still shall they kneel, submiss to kiss the rod...[63]

Lovell was stupefied by the poor public backing given to the quaker Edward Long-Fox for his efforts to force an independent inquiry into the Corporation's handling of the Bristol Bridge killings. The impact of Fox's Committee for Investigating Bridge Affairs was minimised by what one pamphleteer derided as the Corporation's 'Pitiful Subterfuge' in accusing Fox of ulterior motives and political disaffection, despite the Committee's efforts to ensure that 'no subject of a political nature shall be introduced directly or indirectly' at any of its meetings[64].

Coleridge's claim never to have been a member of 'any party or club or society'[65], was probably true. Taking a

63. Robert Lovell, Bristol: a Satire (Bristol 1794).
64. For the debate over the loyalism of the Committee, see below and the bound volume of pamphlets on the subject in Bristol Public Library. The quotation is from Plain Truth (Bristol 1793). For the Committee's efforts to be non-political see the manuscript Minutebook of the Committee for Investigating Bridge Affairs 1793-4, Bristol Public Library.
65. Quoted in L Patton and P Mann (eds), The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, I, 'Lectures, 1795; on Politics and Religion', (Cambridge 1971), p.xxvi.

cue from John Thelwall whom he much admired, and partly to raise funds for the projected utopian/communist 'pantisocracy' in America with Lovell and Southey, he began a series of public lectures in 1795. Despite the radical subject-matter (from the French Revolution to Pitt's Gagging Acts), Coleridge did not invite association with the Constitutional Society by using their Union Street rooms, but hired public rooms at various Bristol inns. This was not the easiest option and the combination of magisterial interference and hostile innkeepers forced the cancellation of several[66]. It was, however, the price of political independence.

The Coleridge circle attempted to raise their public profile on two platforms simultaneously in the autumn of 1795. The first, a meeting convened by themselves in opposition to the Gagging Bills and intended for the Guildhall, fell foul of mayor James Harvey's veto and had to be cancelled[67]. In response, the printer John Rose, the Foxite Whig William Coates, and Fox, Lovell and Coleridge led a party of objectors into another public meeting at the Guildhall, called by Harvey to adopt a loyal address to the King after the mobbing of his coach in London, and moved an anti-war amendment. Rose's pointed complaint that the King was being prevented from hearing the true voice of his subjects by a conspiracy of

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66. See Patton & Mann, op cit., p.xxxii; and S T Coleridge, An Answer to a Letter to Edward Long Fox MD (Bristol 1795).
67. Thomas Beddoes, A Word in Defence of the Bill of Rights Against Gagging Bills, (Bristol 1795).

'wicked, designing and corrupt men' was ignored by Harvey however and the amendment over-ruled. Coleridge's 'eloquent... pathetic... and sublime' qualities as an orator earned him a hearing when Fox and Lovell had been shouted down, but Harvey was not persuaded to give way[68].

Beddoes quickly published a pamphlet exposing Harvey's partiality in preventing their meeting to oppose the Gagging Acts, but within days Harvey changed his mind and allowed it to go ahead - to the annoyance of several of his colleagues on the Corporation[69]. An anti-Bills petition was drawn up at the meeting and presented to parliament by a less than enthusiastic Lord Sheffield, MP for the borough[70].

Lively debates over the propriety and legitimacy of the Gagging Bills took place in most towns in the region. The attack on the King's coach may have been caused more by the privations of an unpopular and economically debilitating war than by any sudden flash of republican sentiment, but it was also seen by many as the logical consequence of the intemperate language employed by popular radical societies in opposing that war, and the encouragement they gave to anti-monarchical feeling. Discussing the Bills in November 1795, the Bath Journal asked the rhetorical question 'Does any man think that

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68. The fullest report of this meeting is in the London Star, reprinted in Patten and Mann, op cit.
69. ibid. The pamphlet was A Word in Defence..., op cit.
70. Patten and Mann, op cit., p.366.

this remedy is not now necessary?'[71]. The Bath Chronicle, shifting its position somewhat from an earlier endorsement of Wyvillite Associations and County meetings for reform was not enthusiastic, but it conceded:

> It is peculiarly the duty of government to watch over (the lower orders) to prevent assemblies, deputations, affiliations and correspondences which the experience of all the world shows to be incompatible with governments or with civil society[72].

Few accepted the necessity for the Bills without some regret for the passing of English liberties. A Bath actor, Edmund Eyre was concerned about the popular outcry

> ...that ministers aim with one blow
> Our rights and franchisements at once to o'erthrow
> That this Bill is most certainly meant to enslave us
> Tho' all honest men see tis needful to save us[73].

Others were less certain. 'To make a man a knave', argued a correspondent in the Chronicle who was anxious to make known he was a 'True Friend of the King and Constitution', 'it is often sufficient to let him know that you think him to be one. Separate the rich and poor and you loosen the firmest bonds of society'[74]. As ever, the dilemma facing the majority was whether public order was more likely to be endangered than secured through repressive legislation; sympathy for the beliefs of the

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71. Bath Journal 30/11/1795.
72. Bath Chronicle 12/11/1795.
73. Edmund Eyre, The Bills (Bath 1795).
74. Bath Chronicle 3/12/1795.

repressed was not at issue. As at Bristol, two 'loyal' petitions were forwarded to parliament from Bath following a stormy public meeting where opinion had been divided over the Bills and the war. The objectors petition was signed by 'a great number of the inhabitants of this city', according to an overtly hostile Bath Herald[75], although the Master of the Rolls is said to have commented that its rival deserved 'greater attention both in respect to numbers and credit', inferring that many signatories had mistaken the anti-Bills petition for a straightforward loyal address[76]. In the Bath Journal's opinion, most signatories were mere schoolboys[77].

Coleridge's venture into radical publishing at Bristol was not a success. The Watchman, which came and went in 1796, never noticeably pursued the pro-reform and anti-Gagging Acts line promised by the prospectus, but settled for an agenda of Whiggish scepticism for Pitt's peace initiatives. The middling-class dissenters who were the backbone of the journal's readership took offence at an 'Essay on Fasts' in the second issue which satirised

75. Bath Herald 28/11/1795.
76. Bath Chronicle 10/12/1795.
77. Bath Journal 14/12/1795. The denigration of petitions as the work of schoolboys was commonplace. See for example the anti-Bills petition from Nottingham in H O Alves, The Paineites: The Influence of Thomas Paine in Four Provincial Towns, 1791-1799 (Ph.D thesis, London, 1982), p.260; and the debate on the bill to abolish the slave trade in 1792 in Bath Journal 9/4/1792. The fact that Schoolboys had signed the Bath Reeves Association's membership book in 1792 was interpreted, conversely, as a commendable sign of youthful patriotism: see J Caulfield, The Reeves Association: A Study of Loyalism in the 1790s (Ph D thesis, Reading 1988), p.44.

their religion and about five hundred resigned their subscriptions in disgust[78]. Ironically, falling support forced the demise of The Watchman just as a new alliance between the radical wing of the Bristol Whigs and leading dissenters was being formed in May 1796. This bore fruit in the candidature at the general election of Benjamin Hobhouse as an independent Whig aiming to spoil the usual 'no-contest' arrangement between the Whigs and Tories.

Although Hobhouse had been briefly associated with the Bath Constitutional Society in 1792-3, parliamentary reform was not an issue in his 'radical' candidature at Bristol. His committee, like the Rev Edward Barry's Society of Independent Freemen in 1790, were concerned rather with the existing rights of the 5000 strong electorate to exercise the franchise in a contested election. But Hobhouse's candidature was also brought about because the Whig club had offered their nomination to Lord Sheffield again - whom the radical wing of the party already held in contempt for his refusal to support the abolition of the slave trade and for his unqualified support for the Gagging Acts - and because they had done so without inviting any of the radical wing (which included William Coates) to the nomination meeting. Hobhouse was therefore nominated at a separate meeting, partly as a gesture of protest[79]. Two other independent candidates declared themselves at the hustings; a Mr S

78. Patten, op cit., p.135.
79. Bristol Mercury 23/5/1796; Handbill headed To Lord Sheffield (Bristol 1796)

Thomas, and David Lewis - the man who had come forward for Edward Barry's Independent Society in 1790.

Scorn for Lord Sheffield within the Hobhouse camp knew no borders. A coalition was proposed with the Tories to return their own candidate, Charles Bragge, along with Hobhouse to exclude Sheffield. Bragge, contended the Hobhouse camp, was a 'gentleman of honour', a distinction he shared with Hobhouse who suddenly found himself packaged for the electorate as 'a native, and a member of the Society of Merchants' and a staunch defender of profitable trade[80]. But the proposed coalition was not a success. The 'most unwarrantable measures' and 'oppressive influence' were brought to bear upon it by the Whig and Tory Committees and the Bragge/Sheffield slate was preserved.

Hobhouse's principled stand against the corrupting influence of no-contest coalitions did not prevent him spending 'about £2000 in beer and cockades. That is - in making the mob filthy and fine', and Coleridge remained unimpressed by him[81]. A crowd gathered in his favour at the close of the first day's polling however, and attacked the Whig Club's committee rooms at the Bush (where the renowned local church and king enthusiast, John Weeks, was landlord), the Mansion House (Mayor

80. See untitled election handbill dated 25/5/1796 in Bristol Public Library.
81. Quoted on L Griggs (ed), The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, I, (Oxford 1956), p.219, Coleridge to John Fellows 31/5/1796.

Harvey's official residence), and the Council House. Bragge's rooms were not interfered with. The choice of targets suggests popular dissatisfaction with the illiberalism and connivance of both Sheffield and the Corporation. Amongst accusations levelled against Sheffield by the Hobhouse camp during the campaign had been the Whig member's support for the Corn Bill during the late scarcity - fostering an association between Sheffield and a pusillanimous Corporation in the supply of 'Small Loaves'[82]. Moreover, Hobhouse had established a reputation as an anti-Corporation man two years earlier when he published a pamphlet accusing them of hypocrisy for supporting the Test Acts whilst cynically appointing dissenters as mayors and sheriffs - forcing them to stand down if they would not take the Anglican oath and forfeit large fines to the Corporation purse[83]. But Hobhouse had no wish to be associated with crowd disorder, and in the face of certain defeat anyway, he pulled out of the contest that night[84].

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82. For Small Loaves see untitled handbill op cit.; for crowd action see Bristol Mercury 30/5/1796.
83. B Hobhouse, Thoughts Humbly Offered to the Mayor and Sheriffs of Bristol (Bristol 1794).
84. Bristol Mercury 30/5/1796; Bath Chronicle 2/6/1796. Sheffield and Bragge won a resounding victory with 679 & 714 votes respectively, while Lewis got four votes and Thomas two. Hobhouse was elected for Bletchingly in 1797, continued his opposition to the war and Pitt's repressive domestic policies, and was approached by the Wiltshire shearmen's union as a potential parliamentary ally during the dispute of 1802. See his entry in Public Characters of 1807, pp.101-136.

The failure of Pitt's peace negotiations with France early in 1797 prompted Corporation loyalists to convene a public meeting 'to support the present just and necessary war as the means of obtaining a secure and honourable peace' on February 1st. Here, Fox, Coates and the banker Joseph Edye clashed once again with Harvey over their attempts to introduce an amendment calling upon the King to sack his ministers and replace them with men more capable of conducting negotiations for peace. When Harvey disallowed it, Edye proposed that in view of the disagreement in the hall, no resolution at all should be put. But this too was disallowed, and amid great uproar, Fox led the objectors away to convene a protest meeting at the Talbot Inn[85]. The temper of confrontations like this one, and particularly the fiery contributions of William Coates, was disagreeable to some members of the circle. Coleridge had already left for Stowey and Lovell had died in 1796. Little is heard of either Coates or Fox after the February fracas[86], but their intervention at an Opposition Whig meeting calling for the dismissal of ministers in April exposed a new divergence of emphasis between them (Coates now standing alone as a critic of

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85. Bristol Mercury 6/2/1797.

86. Coates was present however at a meeting at Bristol in 1809 at which he presented a petition in favour of parliamentary reform: Bristol Gazette 1/6/1809. Harrison cites Fox's own claim that his record of involvement with radical causes 'prejudiced his interest as a medical man', op cit., p.88; but it does not seem to have been an obstacle to his being offered a job as private physician to George III at Fox's purpose-built Bristol madhouse in 1811: I Macalpine and R Hunter, George III and the Mad Business (London 1969), p.327.

all Pittite policies, including repression in Ireland) and revealed open division between them and Beddoes - who referred to Coates and his friends as 'wild beasts'. Beddoes' continued to moderate his stance until it coincided almost perfectly with that of the Opposition Whigs and dropped all reference to domestic repression. A merchant named Garnet silenced Coates with a reminder that 'the friends of Administration always construe any desire for Reform into a love of Anarchy', and it was Beddoes' petition, opposing nothing but the continuation of the war, that was adopted[87]. James Losh, a close friend of the Coleridge circle who moved to Bath in 1796, attended the February meeting but later decided to

> withdraw for ever from politics, never to interfere further than by calm discussion, and when that cannot be had - I am determined to be silent... all bitterness of contention, even in words should be abstained from by a sincere follower of the humble Jesus[88].

This is not the stuff from which revolutions are made.

Moreover, the position adopted in 1794 by these liberal objectors against the immorality of war and the infringement of civil liberties was becoming increasingly untenable. The years 1796-7 witnessed French attempts to

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87. The only full report of this meeting I have found, and of Fox, Beddoes and Coates' role in it is in the Courier 27, 28 & 29/4/1797.
88. James Losh, Ms Diaries, Microfilm kept at Carlisle City Library, note made in back of 1798 volume, reviewing his activity over the previous year.

invade Ireland, the publication of French plans to destroy Bristol by fire, and an ill-conceived landing in South Wales. British radicals, forced underground by legal restraints, began to be associated more strongly with plans for insurrection (or at least, the carrying of their argument by physical force) than the simple circulation of pamphlets and the discussion of reform petitions. The alarming extent of their influence was deduced from the impertinence of the 'floating republic' naval mutinies in the spring of 1797, just as fears of a French invasion reached their dizziest heights. As we shall see, the Bristol Constitutional Society had their rooms attacked by an angry crowd at about this time. Opposition as such did not cease at Bristol after February 1797, but in respectable society it was led by different men and with dissimilar objectives to those of the Coleridge circle.

Beddoes' described his moderate petition at the April meeting as 'the first and most effective step towards the restoration of public credit', and this was the key to non-radical war opposition after the Pembroke landing. The merchant conveners of that meeting were concerned to reverse Bristol's commercial decline; a condition for which they held Pitt responsible because the bungling of the recent peace negotiations had closed the door on peace for the foreseeable future, and made a French invasion attempt seem more likely. The run on the banks

and consequent stoppage of cash payments[89] that followed the Pembroke landing had created a situation in which they believed 'the staple manufactories of the country totter on the brink of destruction - we attest the decline of our particular city'[90].

The apparent collapse of financial institutions and the interference with national currency traditions struck many observers as portents of doom. Hostile petitions and addresses similar to the Bristol one rained down upon Pitt's administration from all over the country that spring. An anonymous poet at Frome railed against the bankers' 'reign of paper pence', which would only increase the likelihood of disorder amongst the poor who would have no money with which to buy bread. Social cohesion was under threat once again at a time when without it, a successful French invasion was a considered a certainty. For,

While sedition's Bills exist
Will interdicted men assist?
Will men proscribed for conscience sake
Whose hearts with persecution ache
(sad victims of oppressive laws)
Come forward in the common cause?

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89. The Bank of England suspended cash payments on Feb 26th, introducing paper notes instead. Most provincial banks in the South West and elsewhere followed suit in a matter of days. For the background see Clive Emsley, British Society and the French Wars 1793-1815, (London 1979), p.56.
90. Bonner and Middleton's Bristol Journal 29/4/1797. For Bristol banks' decision to stop cash payments see ibid., 4/3/1797.

Or will acquitted felons go

Like Volunteers to quell the foe?

The poet feared not[91].

The Radical Underground, 1795-1798.

As the liberal-minded friends of peace and liberty built their response to the escalation of scarcity-related disorder in the autumn of 1795, the radical clubs did their best to capitalise on it. A Glastonbury man was caught distributing 'seditious and treasonable' reform leaflets amongst the customers of an inn at Wells in September, whilst in Bristol handbills of 'the most treasonable kind' were pressed upon Privates of the Hampshire Fencibles when they arrived in the city to disperse striking hatters and colliers in November[92]. Indications that regular links were being maintained between corresponding societies in London and the South West at this time surfaced in the detention of a journeyman named Thomas Fletcher (who gave a Bath address at his examination) for distributing radical leaflets in the capital, and John Chossoll at Bristol who admitted contact with the LCS and having witnessed the attack on the King's coach. Fletcher was a member of an LCS division for which the secretary was William Bennett - a 'free burgess and freeholder of Bristol' who was later to

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91. Anon, The State of the Times (Frome 1797).
92. Bath Chronicle 10/9/1795; Bristol Corporation Letter Book, Harvey to Portland 2/12/1795; WO1/1092, Rooke to Lewis 13/11/1795.

play a major role in the South Western underground. Chossoll, held by Harvey for three weeks without charge, was finally turned loose with a spy on his tail to 'keep an eye on him'[93].

Whether directly related to the lowering of bread prices during the late spring of 1796 or not, we hear nothing more of the radical clubs until 1797 when the Bristol Constitutional Society held a 'numerous and respectable meeting of the Friends of Freedom' at their Union Street rooms in January. This marked the first anniversary of the acquittal of the Londoner, William Stone, who had been charged with conspiring to supply the French with information about the level of disaffection in England[94]. Correspondence from Nottingham which proved 'that there is a certain number of persons at Bristol who avow seditious principles' fell into the hands of mayor James Harvey at this time and Portland instructed him to 'frustrate any attempts that may be made'[95]. Two months later, William Bennett - last heard of in London, but now

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93. For Fletcher's arrest in London see Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 14/11/1795 and for his LCS connections see Mary Thale, op cit., p.339. For Bennett's status at Bristol see King (anon), A Statement of the Facts Relative to the Riot at Union Street... (Bristol 1797). For Chossoll see Bristol Corporation Letter Book, Harvey to Portland 2/12/1795 7/12/1795, 11/12/1795 & 28/12/1795, and Portland's replies in HO 43/7. Fletcher was later to become a divisional secretary for a London section of the revolutionary United Englishmen: see HO 42/42, Testimony transmitted to Richard Ford, 12/3/1798.
87. The Courier 3/2/1797. The meeting went unreported in all local papers. For Stone see Mary Thale, op cit., p.156, n.12.
95. HO 43/8, Portland to Harvey, 25/1/1797.

secretary of the Bristol Corresponding Society[96] (seemingly a separate body from the Constitutional Society) - was taken up by mayor Harvey for distributing handbills days after the Pembroke landing, which contained the phrase, 'Rise, rise virtue, send forth thy darling instrument, confidence is all, all is ours'. The author was a man named King who owned the chop house above which the Constitutional Society had its rooms, and who had 'employed' Bennett to distribute the bills. Harvey was initially keen to charge Bennett with breach of the peace and commit him for want of bail, but was doubtful that the charge would hold up and he lost confidence completely when King came to the Mansion House armed with the legal advice of a solicitor who believed he had acted improperly in demanding sureties.

Bennett was therefore released[97], but found himself in detention again three weeks later on March 27th, this time for selling radical newspapers outside the exchange. Attacked by a small crowd who beat him, 'rolled him in the kenel' and relieved him of his papers and hat, Bennett was dragged before Harvey and bound over to appear at the quarter sessions on charges of assault (upon a member of the crowd) and breach of the peace. Leaving the Council House with King, who had come to offer bail, Bennett found the crowd waiting for him

96. He was identified as such by his uncle in a letter to William Wickham in 1798: PC1/42/A140, Major to 30/4/1798.
97. Bristol Corporation Letter Book, Harvey to Vicary Gibbs, 3/3/1797.

outside and the two men were chased down Wine Street to King's shop. A siege began. King sent a message to Harvey appealing for assistance and a few constables were dispatched to advise him to lock the doors. Twenty members of the Constitutional Society arrived in the early evening and there were scuffles as they pushed through the crowd and went inside. When the constables left at 8pm, the crowd tried to force an entry and shots were fired from a window by a member of the Society 'in hope of intimidating them'. King sent for help from the Council House again, and at 9pm Harvey arrived, confiscated the gun and told King that the crowd would disperse if the members of the Society left the building. As they filed out, Harvey turned to the crowd and said,

> Gentlemen, I thank you for your loyalty - I own he is a bad subject, but this is not the way to punish him - leave him to us[98].

Then he left. At 9.30pm, the crowd launched a final assault on the front door, broke in and stole food and furniture before King could see them off with a sword.

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98. Unless otherwise stated, this account of the attack on the Constitutional Society's rooms is taken from King's published account, A Statement of the Facts Relative to the Riot at Union Street, Bristol...With Some Free Observations on the Conduct of the Civil Power on that Occasion, (Bristol 1797). The incident was completely ignored by the Bristol and national press and only alluded to briefly in a report of a trial hearing five months later in Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 19/7/1797.

The crowd gathered again the following day and King tried three times to persuade both Harvey and Alderman George Daubeny to intervene

> to endeavour if possible to rescue my family and property from the most daring set of rioters... I have had two of my windows broke and they are still increasing in number... It is now growing dark and I have every reason to suppose as night comes on the house will be demolished[99].

At 8.30pm, after another series of assaults on members of the Society who ventured into Union Street, Harvey appeared with a small force of constables to protect the building. He then rounded on King, blaming him for inflaming the crowd with his seditious pamphlets, and left. Shortly after this, a constable arrested two stone-throwers and the crowd, realising the game was over, dispersed quietly. Both detainees were released without charge the following morning.

King does not appear to have been unduly intimidated by his two-day ordeal. Not only did he publish a damning indictment of Harvey's behaviour in his Statement of Facts, but his shop continued as a contact address for correspondence with London. In May, Harvey intercepted a package of 500 pamphlets addressed to King from (probably) the LCS and forwarded them to Portland for legal opinion. King took an unusually cautious line when

99. Corporation Letter Box 1796, unnumbered bundle, J King to J Harvey, wrongly dated 20/3/1797. The letter must have been written on the 28th.

questioned, denying all knowledge of them and insisting they had been wrongly addressed. They may have concerned the London and provincial open air meetings being planned by the LCS at this time. The Home Office advised Harvey to go ahead with a prosecution and promised the 'strongest co-operation', but perhaps because they did not also offer to pay for it, Harvey took the matter no further[100]. In August, King brought a prosecution against Latham, a member of the Union Street crowd but without success. Latham was, declared a jubilant Felix Farleys, 'a very loyal and inoffensive man'[101].

The LCS's decision to stage a mass outdoor public meeting for reform on July 31st 1797, and encourage provincial societies to do the same, challenged the spirit of the Seditious Meetings Act by the careful observance of its provisions[102]. Standard histories of radicalism in this period record that only Nottingham answered the London society's call and that both meetings were prohibited and dispersed. In fact, the Bristol radicals had every intention of holding a meeting as well but, as Harvey

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100. Corporation Letter Book, Harvey to Portland, 20/5/1797. The Home Office reply is in Corporation Letter Box 1796, and HO 43/9, John King (under-secretary) to Harvey 23/5/1797.
101. Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 19/8/1797.
102. Technically, public meetings of fifty or more people remained legal provided a complicated requisition and advertising procedure was observed. See Mary Thale, op cit., for detail of the controversey surrounding the LCS meeting, and for the response from provincial societies, pp.399-403. For government's preparations for dispersal see the Whitehall circular letter to all provincial authorities dated July 21st in PC1/38/A123.

told Portland the following day, 'a stop was put to it'. It is possible that this meeting was to have been addressed by the well-known LCS orator, John Thelwall, for we know he had just spent several days at Alfoxden with Coleridge, Thomas Poole and Wordsworth and that he left there for Bristol en route to South Wales on July 27th[103]. Harvey monitored his arrival and 'took steps' to prevent him from lecturing in the city[104]. The speaker was certainly not to have been Bennett for he was in London on the 31st, presumably attending the LCS meeting at St Pancras and making an unsuccessful claim for expenses to cover the work he was doing in Bristol[105].

Harvey was afraid the radicals would attempt to reconvene their meeting and that handbills advertising it were already in circulation. Portland noted his 'alarm' and expressed surprise at the Bristol society's persistence in the light of the routing of the LCS on the 31st, but confirmed that the prevention of the meeting would be a

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103. Thelwall's movements are traced without reference to the Bristol meeting by Nicholas Roe, Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years (Oxford 1988), pp.234-6.Shortly after Thelwall's departure from Alfoxden, locally transmitted fears that French agents were active in the vicinity were investigated by the government spy, James Walsh. On discovering that these agents were none other than Wordsworth, Coleridge and Poole sitting on campstools, looking out to sea and composing verses, Walsh nevertheless retained an interest when he learned of Thelwall's involvement. See various letters in HO 42/41 dated 11/8/1797 to 15/8/1797.
104. Corporation Letter Book, Harvey to Portland 1/8/1797.
105. Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 12/8/1797.

simple matter within the terms of the Act[106]. By August 8th, Harvey had put his fears to one side:

> I am under no apprehension of any serious evil that can arise from the disaffected of this place, who with confidence I acquaint your Grace are, comparatively speaking, very few indeed[107].

But the fate of the second meeting may well have been sealed by the arrest at Bath of Bennett and a journeyman tailor named Thomas Robins on August 11th. These two had been under surveillance there for keeping company with 'about six journeyman shoemakers and a journeyman smith', distributing radical leaflets and making 'parole declarations' in Bath alehouses. During Bennett's examination, a sketch showing 'the form of a Pike which they wished to have made' was discovered on the reverse of a leaflet in his possession and the Bath magistrates forwarded this to Portland along with details of Bennett and Robins' seditious language. The two men were committed to Bath gaol until the Quarter Sessions in October when they were discharged with a 'severe reprimand'[108]. Bennett would later confirm his 'mishun' to procure pikes for militants at Bristol and Bath, a concern he was perfectly suited for because his past

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106. HO 43/9, Portland to Harvey 7/8/1797.
107. Corporation Letter Book, Harvey to Portland 8/8/1797. A copy in the Corporation Letter Box denies that he was ever concerned about a second meeting and even that he sent the letter referred to by Portland stating that he was!
108. HO 42/41, Jefferies to Portland 11/8/1797; Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 12/8/1797; HO 43/9, John King to Jefferies 16/8/1797. See also Bath Quarter Session Rolls, 5/10/1797, Bath Guildhall Record Office.

record within the LCS and its small revolutionary splinter group, the Friends of Liberty, had marked him as a proponent of physical force some years earlier[109].

Another Bath radical, George Wilkinson, a printer and ex-member of the Irish Volunteers who had been gaoled for seditious speech in 1794, also came to the attention of government agents in 1797. Wilkinson, a member of the Bath Corresponding Society, had links with both the LCS (for which he had acted as a requisitioner of the ill-fated July 31st public meeting[110]) and the London United Irishmen and, like Bennett was a frequent traveller between the capital and the West Country. Constant movement like this had been more or less dictated by government's interference with the mail, forcing the underground societies to 'communicate not by sending letters as by sending agents backwards and forwards'[111]. Wilkinson had been collecting money for a national 'deputies fund' at Bath in the spring[112], but in June and July he was present at meetings of the United English/United Irish coalition in London. He may very possibly have been assigned responsibility for organising the disaffected Irish at Bristol for the proposed

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109. Bennett's earlier career may be traced in Mary Thale, op cit., pp.245 and 346. The Friends of Liberty had rejoined the LCS in 1796 because 'The Corresponding Society, having great connections, can furnish them with arms on Emergency'.
110. See advertisement in the Courier 22/7/1797 for which Wilkinson gave a London address at 115, Shoreditch.
111. HO 42/42, Testimony transmitted to Richard Ford, 12/3/1798.
112. See Mary Thale, op cit., pp.394 & 396.

diversionary rising there in the event of a French-backed rebellion in Ireland. At any rate, he was present, singing 'inflammatory songs', at at least four secret meetings of the coalition in the Furnivals Inn cellar, Holborn - 'the resort of all those who were engaged most deeply in the conspiracy'[113]. A Frenchman named Goddett, 'a seditious and dangerous character', his colleague Bombelle and a local man named Sylvester were reportedly acting suspiciously at Bath in the Spring[114], and two members of the LCS were thought to have stopped at Bristol on their way to negotiate with the French in September. Mayor Harvey's 'confidential agents' were despatched to hunt for them in the streets and inns of the city, but they were not found[115].

Radical activity was also noted during 1797 and 1798 in the weaving towns of Trowbridge, Bradford and Phillips Norton where societies were reportedly in touch with the LCS[116]. The progress of underground conspiracies remains

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113. PC1/40/A132 contains several informers' reports of these meetings. See also J Ann Hone, For The Cause of Truth: Radicalism in London, 1796-1821 (Oxford 1982), pp.53-4 for their importance, and Roger Wells, Insurrection, p.123.
114. HO 5/2, Grenville to Mayor of Bath, 7/3/1797 & 11/3/1797.
115. The suspects were William Clark and a man named Donaldson; Corporation Letter Book, Harvey to Portland, 13/9/1797.
116. For Trowbridge and Phillips Norton see the list of United Corresponding Societies seized at London in BL Add Ms 59308. For Bradford see PC1/3118, Clerk of North Bradely to Portland, 22/4/1798. Radicalism in these centres is discussed more fully in the chapter on Work (below). Randall mistakenly assumes the nearest societies to the weaving district to have been at Bristol and Tewkesbury; Before The Luddites, pp.598-607.

shadowy however. William Bennett was asked by LCS secretary Thomas Evans to take a 'certain quantity of pikes' to Bristol 'in order to plant a society there of United Britons' in the spring of 1798[117]; and another 'intelligent and fierce revolutionist'[118] with a strong track record was sent from London to help him in March, Dr Robert Watson. Watson, who had fought the British in America, and been on intimate terms with Lord George Gordon during the latter's incarceration at Newgate, identified himself completely with physical force. He spent two years in Newgate himself for playing a major role in the London Crimp House riots of 1794, and was frequently in dispute with the LCS Executive over his reckless and argumentative behaviour[119]. These squabbles reached something of a climax in 1797 when it was suggested by some of the more cautious members that Watson had been in Portsmouth during the Spithead mutiny, 'conferring with the leading mutineers'[120]. Watson was convinced that 'a revolution would certainly take place here and it would be better for those who acted than for

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117. According to Bennett's testimony in PC1/42/A140, Bennett to Wickham (2nd letter), 30/4/1798.
118. The opinion of Watson's biographer, A Lang, in his vignette, 'A Wild Career', Illustrated London News, 12/3/1892. This resume includes a portrait by Vogelstein.
119. For the fullest account of the case against Watson after the Crimp House riots, see Morning Chronicle, 15/11/1794 and the Courier, 17/11/1794. For his arguments with the Executive, see reports in BL Add Ms 27812, and references in Mary Thale, op cit., p.20.
120. See the spy's report dated 25/5/1797 in PC1/41/A138, the informers' statements dated 12/3/1798 in HO 42/42, and the statement of Henry Hastings in PC1/43/A152.

those who behaved supinely'[121]. If pikes were being gathered at Bristol for a prospective diversionary rising, there can be little doubt about the purpose of Evans' decision to send him there to work with Bennett, and possibly Wilkinson.

It will later be argued that although the South West coast was poorly defended and peculiarly unprepared to meet an invading fleet of Frenchmen, the acute fear and antipathy felt by the majority of the local population for a landing made the plans of the United Britons at Bristol completely untenable. Watson was very optimistic however. A document seized in London which was probably drawn up by Watson himself, named Bristol and Bath as two of the fifteen towns in Britain 'where there is the best prospect'[122]. Good prospects or not, militant elements at Bristol and Bath do not seem to have started preparing seriously for insurrection before the summer of 1797 - when Bennett's involvement in pike procurement began. The movement cannot consequently have been very far advanced there when the government moved decisively against the United leadership at Manchester and London - the two principal centres of the conspiracy - to nip preparations in the bud during April 1798. Watson had been at Bristol

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121. According to an erstwhile colleague, Henry Hastings and quoted by Marianne Elliott, Partners in Revolution: The United Irishmen and France (Yale 1983), pp.141-2.
122. PC1/43/A152, papers seized on Henry Hastings. The other thirteen were London, Maidstone, Norwich, Derby, Nottinghan, Liverpool, Sheffield, Newcastle, Birmingham and neighbourhood, Portsmouth, the Dundee/Perth area, Glasgow and Edinburgh.

for no more than a month when a meeting of the LCS General Committee was raided at Wych Street on April 19th. Amongst those taken up, probably when he called at the house earlier in the day, was the unfortunate William Bennett who had gone to discuss the allocation and purchase of more pikes. Samples of these were found on the table by Bow Street runners when they raided the evening meeting. Bennett was held and questioned for nine days, then released without charge[123].

There is no record of Bennett's examination by the Privy Council, but the evidence suggests that William Wickham considered him a pretty small fish, offered to drop charges on condition that he became an informer, that Bennett accepted, and that the day after his release, Wickham sent Bennett a letter enclosing a 'generous loan'. His new career was curtailed however by a letter from his uncle, James Major, to Wickham in which the extent of Bennett's past commitment to the Bristol Corresponding Society was disclosed[124]. Wickham evidently decided Bennett was not to be trusted for when he arrived at Wickham's office on the 30th, his uncle's letter had

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123. Arrest before the meeting may explain the absence of Bennett's name from the official lists of prisoners taken at Wych Street. For confirmation of the date and outline circumstances of his arrest, see PC1/42/A140, Bennett to Wickham 30/4/1798 (2nd letter) and PC1/41/A138, List of Prisoners Taken on April 19th. The Wych Street meeting is described in Roger Wells, Insurrection, p.122 and Mary Thale, op cit., p.429. For Bennett's discharge from custody see PC1/44/A161, List of Prisoners Taken and the dates of their release, 1798 & 1799.

124. PC1/42/A140, Major to Wickham 30/4/1798.

just preceded him, and he was refused an interview. He left a note reminding Wickham that he had 'a great deal of information to lay before the Privy Council' and that he was coming forward 'for the good of my King and Country'. He returned an hour later but was turned away and some allusion made to his uncle's letter. Bennett was disappointed and left a second, rather wildly composed note telling Wickham that

> Mr Major's observation is unfounded. He is afraid of my criminating him... as a friend of Humanity, I think it hard I cannot obtain an interview to my satisfaction[125].

Spurned by Wickham, Bennett went back to the LCS. His uncle thought he had gone either to Portsmouth or Bristol, but a Whitechapel magistrate noticed him at a meeting with his old colleague Thomas Fletcher and nine others early in May. At this meeting it was said that at least six wanted radicals, including Robert Crossfield, president of the LCS and an escapee from Wych Street, had fled to Bristol and were now 'waiting to embark for America'[126].

Another of those waiting to embark at Bristol was Robert Watson. In the days following the London and Manchester arrests, mayor Harvey sanctioned 'nightly patrols' of the Volunteers to root out all 'traitors and incendiaries' in

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125. PC1/42/A140, Bennett to Wickham (2 letters), 30/4/1798.
126. PC1/42/A143, Wright to Richard Ford, 7/5/1798.

the city[127]. When a warrant for high treason was issued against Watson from London on May 23rd, he evaded discovery by obtaining a passage on the 'Mary' and sailing to New York disguised as a Polish Jew[128]. By 1799, Watson was in Paris claiming there had been 200,000 men ready to rise in England in 1797 and offering the Directory £20 million to revitalise their invasion plans. He told the French that he was LCS President, and the 'representative of the Associations of Bath, Bristol etc.'[129] Watson's optimism and imagination seem boundless.

The government's pre-emptive strike against the United English and United Irish conspiracy of 1797-8 brought an end to Bennett and Watson's association with the South West, and marked the end of an important phase in the region's radical history. Whilst the 'underground' period is still poorly documented, the activity of the clubs and their participation in the LCS and United agitations is more discernible than for the earlier 1792-95 period.

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127. Felix Farley's Bristol Journal 28/4/1798.
128. At least this is the story printed in The Times, 26/5/1798. His own version has him sailing to Sweden via London and appears in his obituary, also in The Times, 22 & 23/11/1838. This is the version followed by Marianne Elliott who tracks him from Sweden to Paris via Denmark, Hamburg and Berlin: op cit., pp.141-2. For the Warrant see PC1/42/A141. In June after Portland had asked all provincial authorities to look out for him, an unfortunate Bedfordshire man was mistaken for Watson and imprisoned but was later released: HO 43/10, Monoux to Portland 15 & 19/6/1798.
129. Albert Goodwin, Friends of Liberty, p.437; H W Meikle, Scotland and the French Revolution (Glasgow 1912), pp.191-2.

Although the Bristol radicals faced a more actively hostile magistracy under mayor Harvey than they had under men like Bengough and Morgan, legalistic interference remained small-scale. If Morgan had feigned blindness when asked about radical societies, Harvey at least knew about the Constitutional Society, had visited its rooms, interviewed and even arrested its key personnel, prevented at least one public meeting and interfered with its mail. But like Morgan, he was disinclined to share his knowledge with Whitehall and never reported the arrest of Bennett or the results of his questioning, or even the two-day riot outside the Society's rooms. Harvey's attitude to radicalism was therefore strictly within the local tradition. Since the Duke of Portland was quite unaware of the activities of men like Bennett and King, or of the arrival of Watson, Whitehall was unable to take any initiatives of its own in Bristol and unlikely to probe for further information. In all probability, Portland assumed the city to be quiet. This was certainly the impression given him by Harvey, and it explains his surprise at the latter's sudden announcement of the Society's projected public meeting in July 1797.

Bristol, Bath and the United Irishmen in 1799

The failure of the Irish rebellion in the summer of 1798 prompted a steady stream of republican fugitives from British reprisals to sail for English ports. Many either passed through or took up residence in Bristol where, as

a major west-facing city port, there was already a significant Irish population. Indeed, by 1841 this had become the largest Anglo-Irish community in South West England and was larger than most in the Midlands and South Wales[130].

Stringent new conditions were placed upon the granting of passports in an effort to stem the flow. This had been largely unsuccessful in preventing Irishmen already in England (and especially from London, Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield and Bristol) from 'repairing to the rebel standard' in the early days of the rebellion however[131], and it was no more effective now. Delays in passport processing at Dublin forced the majority of incoming Irishmen to travel without authorised papers. This caused confusion at English customs and mayor Thomas Daniel had to be politely restrained by the Duke of Portland when his over-enthusiasm caused the detention of a number of loyal and influential men. 'Exercise your discretion', urged Portland[132], with the result that Daniel became nervous about detaining anybody. With something like the initial determination of the Reeves

130. There was no identifiable Irish quarter however. See J A Jackson, The Irish in Britain (London 1963), p.74; K O'Conner, The Irish in Britain (Dublin 1972); D Large, 'The Irish in Bristol in 1851: A Census Enumeration', in R Swift & S Gilley (eds), The Irish in the Victorian City (London 1985), pp.37-41. There were approximately 4000 Irish-born people living in Bristol by 1841.

131. HO 42/26, Extract of Information respecting the United Irishmen, signed by Richard Ford and dated March-April 1798.

132. Letter reproduced in C Vane (ed), Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh (London 1848), 1, p.214.

movement seven years earlier, Bristolians saw and reported rebel Irishmen everywhere[133]. Acting on anonymous information in September, Daniel pursued two Irish gentlemen to Bath in the mistaken belief that one of them was the rebel leader Joseph Holt, previously thought to be hiding with his men in the Wicklow hills. He was eventually warned off by the mayor of Bath[134].

Yet these fears were not groundless. Wickham was apprehensive about French ambitions in Ireland even after the rebellion had been put down, and had received information that a fleet was preparing at Brest and was expected to sail for Ireland in the spring of 1799. Once again, Bristol was to figure strongly in a supporting role. English divisions of the United Irishmen (UI) had been instructed

> to endeavour to cause a rising at the same moment of the United men in the capital and, if possible, in Bristol and Manchester, so that this country may be prevented from sending any troops to Ireland[135].

The Report of the reconvened Committee of Secrecy in March, compiled after the lengthy interrogation of

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133. See for example the confused and erroneous reports concerning the capture of William Webb when he was already being held in a London gaol, and Beauchamp Bagnal Harvey shortly after his execution in Ireland. For Webb: Felix Farleys Bristol Journal, 9/6/1798, and HO 43/10, Wickham to Daniel 7/6/1798 & 19/6/1798. For Harvey: HO 43/10, Wickham to Daniel 30/6/1798 & Wickham to J Skipp 11/7/1798.
134. Bristol Corporation Letter Book, Daniel to Portland, 26/9/1798 et seq, and HO 43/10, Portland to Daniel 27/9/1798.
135. Letter in Correspondence of Lord Castlereagh, 2, p.194, Wickham to Castlereagh 28/2/1799.

suspects captured in England and Scotland concluded that 'chief progress' had been made not only in London, Liverpool, and Manchester but

> in many parts of the West of England and of Wales more immediately communicating with Ireland and in which there are many United Irishmen either as residents or as fugitives from their country[136].

It appeared that Dublin Castle's policy of allowing a number of pardoned rebel leaders to take up residence in England on the grounds that they were only dangerous while they remained in Ireland, had not been particularly wise.

Government agents were understandably keeping a close watch on George Wilkinson at this time. By the winter of 1798-1799, he had risen to some prominence in the re-grouped UI as a negotiator and messenger between exiled leaders in Hamburg and French diplomats in Paris. In January the Committee of Secrecy was told that Wilkinson had recently returned from France and gone to Bristol carrying 'a great number of libellous publications', but more precise detail evaded them[137]. Attention was also focussed on three rebel leaders thought to have taken lodgings at Bristol, Edward Fitzgerald, Garrett Byrne and Col. James Plunkett. Fitzgerald and Byrne had led the UI in Wexford and Wicklow in 1798 and suffered imprisonment at Dublin when they surrendered. They were granted a

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136. Report of the Committee of Secrecy (London 1799).
137. PC1/43/A152, anonymous information dated 26/1/1799..

pardon and permission to go to England after agreeing to negotiate the surrender of the rest of their forces[138]. But the capture of the real Joseph Holt in Ireland had revealed a connection between Fitzgerald and '20,000 rebels organised at Cork and its neighbourhood who are determined to make a rising on the evening of Easter Sunday next'[139]. Plunkett was a French army veteran who had led 3000 UI in Roscommon but surrendered when he saw the pitiful inadequacy of Humbert's landing force. He too was allowed to go to England[140].

On March 16th, Portland ordered the diversion of Plunkett's mail from Bristol to London and General Rooke assured him that all three Irishmen (and a fourth, McLaughlin[141] who had just joined them) would be 'watched narrowly'[142]. But Portland decided against surveillance. On March 19th he issued warrants for the arrest of Fitzgerald and Byrne and sent two officers to Bristol with them, Courvoisier and Elsworth. He told the mayor, now Robert Claxton, that Plunkett and McLaughlin were not

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138. See Thomas Pakenham, The Year of Liberty (London 1969), pp.315-7; A H Rowan, Autobiography of A H Rowan (1803, reprinted Shannon 1972), p.370; Bristol Gazette 28/3/1799; and HO 100/86, Cornwallis to Portland 30/3/1799.
139. HO 100/86, Information of Joseph Holt to Cornwallis, 27/2/1799.
140. See R Hayes, The Last Invasion of Ireland (Dublin 1939), pp129-131.
141. Portland's inquiries to Dublin Castle led him to believe McLaughlin was 'intimate with the Irish Directory': Bristol Corporation Letter Box 1798, Portland to Claxton 19/3/1799.
142. HO 43/11, Portland to GPO, 16/3/1799; HO 42/46, Rooke to Portland 18/3/1799.

to be arrested but that a watch should be kept on them because

> His Majesty's confidential servants have received the most authentic intelligence that treasonable societies of United Irishmen are actually formed in the city of Bristol under orders and direction of secret committees who hold regular correspondence with the rebels in Ireland and that these societies are prepared to act in conformity to such instructions as they may receive from that country

He told Claxton to discover the leaders and their places of meeting and promised the 'fullest protection and indemnity' for whatever measures he decided to take. He enclosed a copy of the warrant used to apprehend an entire UI division in London a few weeks earlier for possible adaptation[143]. Courvoisier and Elsworth arrived at Bristol by coach on the evening of March 21st and delivered the warrants along with Portland's letter to Claxton. At 7 o'clock the following morning, these three with two of Claxton's own officers, General Rooke, and a party of the Pembrokeshire militia raided Fitzgerald and Byrne's lodgings in Queen Square and took them into custody together with Fitzgerald's steward, James Mulloy. After packing the first two off to London for questioning and shutting Mulloy in the Bridewell, Rooke and Claxton both wrote to Portland of their success and promised more to follow. 'I have this morning received some information

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143. Bristol Corporation Letter Box 1798, Portland to Claxton 19/3/1799, marked SECRET.

which I hope will lead to the discovery (of other conspirators), wrote Claxton, while Rooke pledged 'every exertion in my power to find out who the disaffected Irishmen are in this city'[144].

Claxton's information concerned the UI meeting room, perhaps the result of his interrogation of Mulloy, for on March 24th he told Portland that rebel meetings were being held weekly at the Crown in Hotwells. A spy was sent but was unable for some reason to report back to Claxton. More spies were sent, but the meetings were either moved or stopped and Claxton had to admit defeat[145]. Presumably the Irish rebels, already put on their guard by the arrest of Byrne and Fitzgerald, had been suspicious of Claxton's first spy and become more circumspect. The possibility of arresting an entire UI division at Bristol, the expressed wish of the Duke of Portland in his letter of the 19th, had in fact been scotched by his own impatience in sending warrants for Fitzgerald and Byrne.

Claxton released Mulloy on the 30th and assigned a spy to follow him but he had now lost McLaughlin, and Plunkett had moved to an unknown address in Bath. Rooke tried, but without success, to locate William Aylmer at Bristol, a rebel commander from Kildare who had surrendered with

144. Bristol Gazette 28/3/1799; The Times 28/3/1799; HO 42/46, Rooke to Portland and Claxton to Portland, 22/3/1799.
145. Corporation Letter Book, Claxton to Portland 24/3/1799 and 17/3/1799.

Fitzgerald in 1798 and who he believed had just arrived 'for the purpose of joining the faction here'. Reluctant to abandon an enterprise that had begun so well, Claxton tried hard to enlist the co-operation of the Bath magistrates in the hunt for Plunkett, for 'a great number of gentlemen from that country together with their servants have taken up their residence at Bath'. He was convinced that a 'daily correspondence' was taking place between members of the UI at Bristol and Bath, and Rooke noted the frequency with which Byrne had visited Bath prior to his arrest[146]. The Irish presence at Bath was certainly strong. One Irish woman believed there were as many as 2000 Irish families at Bath in 1799 'and I believe I know forty at least'[147]. Their influence was not always considered beneficial. According to an anonymous informant to the Privy Council,

> Much mischief is going on in this town of Bath. The tradesfolks are in general disaffected and meetings for evil purposes abound among them... Colonel Plunkett... was here for a long time and is to my belief at present in the town. I look on it as a sort of rallying point where people can easily meet for a day or two and information can be given and

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146. Bristol Corporation Letter Box 1798, Portland to Claxton 30/3/1799; Corporation Letter Book, Claxton to Portland 24/3/1799; HO 42/46, Rooke to Portland 24/3/1799; HO 43/11, Portland to Mayor of Bath 31/3/1799. For Aylmer, see Thomas Pakenham, op cit., p.127.
147. Quoted by Trevor Fawcett, 'The Irish in Eighteenth Century Bath', Newsletter of the History of Bath Research Group, 15, (May 1991).

received from all parts of the kingdom, and with particular speed and convenience from Ireland[148].

Portland quizzed Cornwallis for further information about Plunkett and was told he had only been allowed to come to England 'under the idea that he could not do much mischief there'[149]. It was not terribly encouraging. Mayor Horton of Bath kept Plunkett under surveillance for several months but could make no case against him despite strong rumours circulating in March 1800 that a branch of the Irish Directory had been established there. Plunkett left for the continent a year or so later and in 1803 applied for permission to re-enter Ireland. He was refused until 1815[150].

The authorities at Bristol turned their attention to the activities of unlicensed Frenchmen and their connections with the Irish community around Hotwells, 'suspected agents of the French Directory' and various attempts to cause 'diversions and disturbances' amongst the French prisoners of War in Stapleton prison[151]. In August 1799, the Foreign Office received word that George Wilkinson had left for Paris from Hamburg in the company of two

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148. PC1/43/A153, anonymous information dated 31/3/1799.
149. R Hayes, op cit., p.295.
150. HO 42/49, Horton to Portland 24/3/1800; R Hayes, op cit., p.276.
151. There are copious references: Corporation Letter Box, 1798, Wickham to Claxton 12/11/1798, 10/5/1799, 29/4/1799, King to Claxton 2/7/1799 & 6/7/1799; 1799 Box, King to Claxton 11/10/1799; Corporation Letter Book, Claxton to Portland 11/5/1799 & 24/1/1800; Bristol Gazette 11/7/1799, Bath Chronicle 9/10/1800; HO 42/49, Jenner to King 28/3/1800; HO 43/11, King to Jenner 3/3/1800.

more prominent UI messengers, McCabe and Palmer, and possibly carrying a smuggled message from the imprisoned Arthur O' Connor at Maidstone. Information about the UI at Hamburg dried up in October however, because the tightness of British surveillance forced the conspirators to stop using the town[152].

We know none of the detail of United Irish conspiracies in Bath or Bristol in 1799. Fitzgerald and Byrne were certainly interrogated in London and detained for several weeks, but they do not appear to have been charged with any offence at the end of it. Byrne insisted they were innocent and 'that their arrest was in consequence of the government not knowing on what terms these gentlemen came from Ireland'[153]. What detail we do have concerns the efforts of the local and national authorities to track the conspirators and apprehend their leaders. That the evidence is considerably better than for the United Britons period (1796-98) may be explained partly by the readiness of mayors Daniel and Claxton to co-operate fully with Whitehall, but it is also a consequence of the effective attention directed to the West in the months following the Irish rebellion by the 'confidential agents' of William Wickham at the Alien Office. Portland learned of Fitzgerald and Byrne's presence at Bristol, it will be remembered, not through the assiduity of the

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152. FO 33/19, Craufurd to Grenville 6/8/1799, 15/8/1799 and 19/10/1799.
153. HO 43/11, Wickham to Byrne 26/3/1799 & PC1/44/A155, Byrne to Arabella Tow 21/4/1799.

civil power, but through spies who answered directly to central government. In contrast to the position of ignorance in which he found himself in 1797, Portland was therefore able to initiate arrests himself and play a more active part in operations against the conspirators.

The absence of references to English radical societies during the authorities' moves against the UI suggests that the Bristol Constitutional Society had ceased to meet by 1799. There is no evidence to suggest that Bennett, Watson or King were either present or politically active in Bristol at this time and it is unlikely their presence would have gone unnoticed or been ignored by a diligent investigator like Claxton if they had been there. A suspicious county magistrate thought fit to tell Portland that a Bath grocer named Lambe, of whom nothing is known despite the justice's opinion that he was 'one of the most active and designing' jacobins in the neighbourhood, had been making frequent trips to Hamburg in the spring of 1799, but there is no evidence connecting him with the UI[154]. The indications then, are that the conspiracy (if that is what it was), had no discernible English dimension[155].

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154. HO 42/47, William Batchellor to Portland 28/5/1799. Batchellor was serious enough about his allegation, and the importance of it, to request that Portland respect his anonymity should any investigation follow. He appears to have been worried for his own safety.

155. A 'conspiracy of disaffected persons' hostile to the Yeovil Volunteers and 'threatening the destruction of the town' was discovered by the mayor of Yeovil in 1799, but no Irish connection is supposed: HO 42/47, Phillips to Portland, 12/4/1799.

Radicalism at the turn of the century, 1799-1804.

Whatever the condition of the clubs, the perseverance of some of their members ensured a degree of continuity throughout the period. This was particularly true of George Wilkinson, who had been active in radical politics at Bath since at least 1794 and had become a man of some importance in the restructured UI after the rebellion. Between 1799 and 1802, Wilkinson was a known confidante of one of the UI men closest to the Despard conspiracy, William McCabe[156], and was suspected of peripheral involvement himself in February or March 1802[157]. The probability that Bristol was involved in the Despard conspiracy is suggested by the undisclosed mission to the city of a United Britons delegate from Hull in the days preceding the trials of January 1803[158]. The Bristol Gazette claimed there were 'several evil-disposed persons' at Bristol worthy of arrest after the taking of Despard and his colleagues in London, and an unidentified man was indeed arrested at Bristol on suspicion of complicity in February[159].

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156. He and McCabe had worked together as UI emmissaries in 1799 and set up a cotton business together at Rouen in 1802. See FO 33/19, Craufurd to Grenville 6/8/1799 & 15/6/1799; and Marianne Elliott, op cit., p.278-9. For McCabe see also Roger Wells, Insurrection, p.232.
157. PC1/3117 (pt 1), anonymous letter to Richard Ford, undated: 'Do you know anything of Wilkinson?'.
158. Roger Wells, Riot and Political Disaffection in Nottinghamshire in the Age of Revolutions 1776-1803 (Nottingham 1983), p.35.
159. Bristol Gazette 25/11/1802; Bath Journal 21/2/1803. The man was arrested for seditious speech but does not appear to have stood trial.

In the culmination of the Wiltshire shearmen's struggle against machinery in 1802, and the days of arrests, detentions and trials between that autumn and March 1803 when Thomas Helliker was hanged for mill-burning, the atmosphere of the dispute became charged by the wider issue of a disaffected soldiery following the peace of Amiens. Whilst it is true that the discharged Wiltshire serviceman who solicited the support of Benjamin Hobhouse for the weavers' plight was primarily concerned about unemployment, his letter was not without a wider political significance. Its timing in relation to the Despard plot and the terminating phrase, 'we are now on the brink for the last struggle', together with the unpatriotic assertion that eight years spent in 'his Majesty's survice' was only 'in Defence of him and his Country' suggest the contemplation of something more than economic redress[160]. Adrian Randall is content to characterise the paper found pinned to the New Inn at Freshford at the beginning of February 1803, and threatening to impose the shearmens' case 'by force of arms', as the 'blood-thirsty rhetoric' of men who knew that such measures would actually prove 'counter-productive[161]. Yet it does not seem mere rhetoric. The note concludes with a very specific call for all men with arms and ammunition to enrol their names by February 10th and 'mutually agree to be commanded by officers appointed

160. HO 42/65, anonymous ex-soldier to B Hobhouse, July 1802.
161. Adrian Randall, Before the Luddites, p.180.

by the majority of thirteen of the oldest soldiers or engineers'[162]. Dr Randall acknowledges the possibility that soldiers were involved in the shearmens' campaign, but not that they took a leading role since the trade-centred nature of the weavers' grievance was long-standing and indisputable[163]. This argument is less convincing however if the soldiers' involvement is considered purely as a product of the cessation of war, and its proximity to the Despard plot with its high degree of emphasis on military participation[164].

George Wilkinson was able to maintain a low enough profile after the Despard affair to join the fifth battalion of the Bath Volunteers. His background was only looked into in 1804 when, after leading a strike of thirty-nine privates in protest over the disciplining of one of their colleagues, he was dismissed by the commanding officer 'on a strong suspicion of his being a United Irishman'. Even then, the extent of his involvement was not understood for the CO was able to cite only his conviction ten years earlier for seditious speech[165].

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162. The full text appears in Bath Journal 7/2/1803.
163. Adrian Randall, op cit., p.181.
164. For the military in the Despard plot see Roger Wells, Insurrection, p.238, in which a soldiers' delegate in London is quoted, reporting the fanciful figure of 4,400 disaffected privates ready to rise with Despard.
165. HO 50/119, Col John Strode to Lord Poulett 8/9/1804 and various statements submitted to Lord Hawksbury, dated 9, 16, & 18/7/1804. See also two broadsheets written by Wilkinson in support of the privates' case: Incontravertible Facts in Defence of the Fifth

There is insufficient evidence to suggest the development of substantial radical organisation in the region during the months preceding the arrest of the Despard circle[166]. To all intents and purposes, the failure of the United Britons in 1798 appears to have caused the demise of the reform societies. Although radicals raised their heads during the acute scarcity of 1800-1801, and may certainly have influenced the attitudes of some sections of the populace towards the causes and alleviation of the crisis, they do not appear to have led, caused or exerted any control over the widespread crowd mobilisations of those years. If they had, it would be reasonable to expect a more pronounced degree of support for and involvement in the Despard conspiracy of 1802. The Committee of Secrecy accused jacobin 'emissaries' from several major towns, including Bristol, of using the scarcity to promote a republican rising in Lancashire in 1801, and believed that some West Country riots 'may in their progress have been encouraged by the disaffected'[167]. Radicals made the most of the familiar argument that Pitt's war with France was the cause of the scarcity's severity. The point was conceded by many. A

Batallion Company and To The Officers of the Bath Loyal Volunteers (Bath 1804).

166. Roger Wells has suggested that the absence of regional detail in the Despard conspiracy may be due to a reluctance on the part of Addington's ministry to inspire fears of provincial disaffection in a difficult political climate: Insurrection, pp.247-8.

167. Second Report of the Committee of Secrecy (London 1801), pp.831-32.

gentleman travelling through Somerset during the height of the 1801 disturbances observed,

> Such is the present state of the West of England, and the universal voice is for peace; the people say the war is the cause of their calamities as the scarcity, if any, and the enormous price of bread and meat are occasioned, they affirm, by the contractors for the fleet and army draining the markets and sweeping the whole country of the food necessary for the inhabitants[168].

But, as in 1795, opposition to the war was not the same thing as support for political reform and there is no evidence that crowd objectives ever went beyond the forced lowering of prices - whatever the wishes of radical agitators. 'Democratic Orators' had reportedly 'got amongst' the people in the Stogursey/Stowey area of Somerset during the autumn of 1799 and it was alleged that a crowd which fixed prices there in 1801 had been influenced by 'delegates of the Jacobin party (who) were very busy and active in this neighbourhood'[169], but the crowd stuck to its objective, price regulation. Poetic eulogies to 'French Liberty' and the 'Sacred Guillotine', like the one fly-posted at Wellington in April 1801, with their calls to 'Half-starved Britons' to 'Pull down the

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168. Courier 2/4/1801.
169. J Ayres (ed), Paupers and Pig-killers: The Diary of William Holland, a Somerset Parson, 1799-1818 (Gloucester 1984), pp.15-16; SCRO DD/AH, bundle 59/12, Davis to Acland, 10/4/1801.

tyrant from his throne' did not really capture the spirit of the regulating masses[170].

The scarcity of 1800-1801 saw not only an increase in the number of reported anonymous threatening letters compared with that of 1795-1796, but an increase too in their use of republican and revolutionary language. But this is no proof that radical ideas had become more widely accepted. The very essence of the anonymous threat is that, unlike the tangible evidence of a gathering crowd, it obscures rather than illuminates the strength of support for the sentiment it promotes. If radicals were using them in 1800 more often than in 1795, it may have been because forms of more open organisation had been largely closed down to them by that date. Since it was common practice for reported anonymous threats to be published verbatim beside a reward notice in the London Gazette and the provincial press, their usefulness as a propaganda weapon will not have been overlooked by marginal and fragmented radical groups, muzzled by the Gagging Acts and the collapse of the corresponding societies. A note found at Bath during a dramatic spate of fire-raising in March 1800 threatened 'Peace and a Large Bread or a King without a Head'[171], and the city streets were soon plastered with 'treasonable and seditious papers... exciting the populace to violence and insurrection'[172].

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170. Copy of anonymous handbill in SCRO DD/AH, bundle 59/12.
171. HO 42/49, Horton to Portland, 13/3/1800.
172. Bath Journal, 17/3/1800.

In May a similar threat against the whole royal family was delivered to the barracks at Trowbridge where 'a bloody revolution will take place soon... The commonwealth of England forever'[173]. The most graphic was found at the barracks in Bristol in March 1801, ostensibly from rebel soldiers:

> If parliament will not agree to help proposals, there shall not a parliament exist on this island... a damnd infernal imposing Lords and Commons a Republic must ensue... France has succeded in her grand undertaking... and we will follow in her example... We are your brother soldiers[174].

Republican prose of this kind was not confined to the urban areas. From the village of Ramsbury in Wiltshire came

> Let us true Britons look to ourselves banish some of Hanover where they came from. Down with your Constitution Arect a Republick... God save the Poor and down with George III[175].

These letters establish the survival of revolutionary radical sentiment, but not the survival of co-ordinated organisation. The strength of radical survival in the district, either as a new or continuing tradition during the crucial post-war and pre-Chartist years, awaits its discovery by historians. Although electoralist support for Henry Hunt at Bristol and John Allen at Bath has been

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173. PC1/3490, Sandby to Rooke (copy), 18/5/1800.
174. HO 42/61, Cowell to Portland, 17/3/1801.
175. HO 42/50, Meyrick to Portland, 12/6/1800.

noted[176], the relationship between 'underground' radicalism in the region and such episodes as the Pentrich rising (1817) or the Thistlewood/Watson conspiracies of 1816-20 has not been explored. According to replies to a government circular to local authorities, there were no prosecutions for sedition in Somerset, Wiltshire or Bristol between 1807 and 1821[177], but that cannot imply an absence of activity. There were certainly prosecutions for selling the unstamped Weekly Register under the Cobblers and Pedlars Act[178]; and at least one man, arrested at Bristol for sedition and suspected complicity with the Thistlewood circle in 1820, evaded prosecution only because depositions were shown to have been taken incorrectly[179]. Agitation and insurrectionary propaganda were reported at Frome, Bath, Calne and Yeovil in 1816[180]. The colliery strikes at Radstock and Paulton in 1817 were allegedly fuelled by 'blasphemous and revolutionary publications... long, industriously and almost gratuitously circulated' in mining communities[181], and connections were suspected at this time between Bath's shoemaking and tailoring unions, John Allen, and

176. See for example, Mark Harrison, op cit., pp.205-20 for Hunt and R S Neale, op cit., pp.330-4 for Allen.
177. HO 52/2, replies from Lord Pembroke, Edward Coles and the Mayor of Bristol.
178. See for example the cases of Abel Cook and John Bullen at Bristol, Bath Chronicle, 22/1/1817 & 29/1/1817.
179. HO 52/1, Mayor of Bristol to Sidmouth, 4/3/1820 & 11/3/1820.
180. Salisbury Journal 9/12/1816 (Frome & Calne); HO 42/156, George to Sidmouth, 5/12/1816 (Bath); HO 42/150, anonymous threatening letter (Yeovil).
181. Proclamation of magistrates and landowners dated 4/3/1817 and published in Bath & Cheltenham Gazette, 12/3/1817.

the attack on the Regents' coach in London[182]. Spencean groups circulating their 'Damnable Doctrines of Levelling' were certainly active then at Bath and Bristol and influential amongst Wiltshire woollen workers[183], and whilst I have found no evidence of surviving radical personnel from the agitation of the 1790s, certain of the men supporting Hunt at Bath in 1817 were again prominent in the Chartist years[184]. John Allen was active from 1812 until at least 1835[185].

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I have argued that the evidence of political radicalism in the South West is considerably greater than the claims of the contemporary civil authorities would suggest, and that the presumed 'absence' of radicalism at Bristol in particular may partly be explained by the reluctance of the Corporation to acknowledge its strength. Despite poor

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182. HO 42/161, Statement of W Lloyd Caldecot, 17/3/1817.
183. Malcolm Chase, The People's Farm: English Radical Agrarianism, 1775-1840 (Oxford 1988), pp.100-01. The spread of radicalism in the weaving district may have been connected with Henry Hunt's outdoor meetings there, especially at Devizes where he led opposition to a loyal address at the County Meeting following the attack on the Regent, and narrowly avoided arrest: Bath & Cheltenham Gazette, 26/3/1817
184. The most noteworthy example was the hatter and alderman, James Crisp. See Bath and Cheltenham Gazette, 8/1/1817.
185. Allen was a prominent member of the Bath Political Union. See his letter 'on behalf of the Reformers of Bath', BL Add MS 47227 (Broughton correspondence) Allen to Lord Broughton, 3/12/1834.

surviving documentation, it is possible to demonstrate the endurance of radical organisation in the region, and to tentatively suggest survival into the post-war years, but the detail of its aspiration and the assessment of its influence remain elusive. Although the surviving evidence of clandestine activity connected with the United movements in the second part of the decade is sketchy, UB and UI conspiracies nationally make little sense without at least an intended Bristol dimension. It would appear that some progress was made in establishing United cells, but that success was limited by government initiatives in London and the North, and probably also by local ambivalence to the diversionary destruction of Bristol. This theme will be taken up again in chapter five. Historians wishing to pursue research in this area will need to pay closer attention to the activities of Robert Watson. His mission to Bristol on behalf of the LCS/UB in 1798 remains, like much of his extraordinary and adventurous life, shrouded in mystery however.

Too few of the participants in popular radicalism are recorded by name for any assessment to be made of the survival of personnel throughout the period or into the post-war years. Strength of support for radicalism, in either its open or clandestine phases, is also difficult to measure. The Bristol Constitutional Society's rooms in Union Street were large enough to accommodate 150 people, and, according to John King, 173 squeezed into them in February 1797 for a celebration of Dr Fox's 'manly

opposition' to the mayor and Corporation. King publicly denied that this had been a meeting of the Constitutional Society however to cover himself against breaches of the Seditious Meetings Act of 1795, and he accordingly assured the mayor in March that he 'never suffered more than 49 persons to assemble at one time'. If the Society's claim of a 'numerous' attendance at a meeting there in January is to be taken seriously, a regular membership of at least fifty people in 1797 does not seem unrealistic[186]. Therefore, the Society should be considered of sufficient strength to have survived repression during the Reevesite years (1792-4) and to have endured beyond the last date on which it is heard of, March 1797. Radicalism did not appear to attract a mass following in the Chartist sense; rather it expressed itself in a network of small, informal and parochial clubs. Since the broad cause of protecting the constitution was common to both the persecuted radical clubs and the officially endorsed Reeves Associations, the discovery of a greater display of public support for the latter than for the former should surprise no-one. Yet, as the present work will argue in chapter four, it should be equally understood that the public endorsement of Reevesism did not necessarily imply active antagonism to reform or the radical clubs.

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186. A Statement of Facts Relative to the Riot in Union Street (Bristol 1797), p.4; Courier 3/2/1797.

Chapter Three

Reevesite Loyalism, the Judiciary, and the Persecution of Radicalism

This chapter examines the growth and development of popular opposition to the radical reform societies discussed in chapter two. The loyalism of this opposition I shall refer to as Reevesite or ministerial because its agenda was broadly defined by the activities of the provincial Association movement begun in London by John Reeves, and by attitudes adopted by the Pitt ministry. As this thesis will demonstrate, loyalism was a concept so widely supported (and poorly defined) that it is necessary to demarcate and clarify what is meant by it in any particular context. Reevesite loyalism was the expression of that fiercely francophobic anti-jacobinsim most often associated with the term 'loyalism' in traditional historiography.

The rapid spread of the Reeves Association (RA) movement during the winter of 1792-3, and the overwhelming support it appeared to enjoy from the public are often stated as

historical facts[1]. Certain questions need to be asked however. Firstly, how committed and 'active' were the rank and file members of this movement, and what were the factors that made membership so attractive to them? If the Associations represented such a successful and passionate consensus of loyal opinion, why did their influence peak and die back so quickly and before the task of destroying the radical clubs had been fully accomplished? Can we be sure, indeed, that the majority of those who joined, even for genuine reasons, shared the same loyalist values as the movement's founders? This chapter suggests answers to these questions, primarily by exposing the coercive conditions under which Reevesite conformity was enforced. Firstly, it tackles the questions of inducement and inclusivity. The supposed voluntary nature of public subscriptions for loyalist causes and the readiness of so many people to sign RA membership books is examined, together with contextual meanings (for both organisers and participants) behind the most dramatic popular manifestations of early Reevesism, the Thomas Paine effigy burnings. The traditional views of K P Bawn, Adrian Randall, Linda

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1. For example, E C Black, The Association: British Extraparliamentary Political Organisation, 1769-1793 (Harvard 1963), p.242: 'The mobilisation of loyalty proved an immediate and unqualified success'; also H T Dickinson, 'Popular Conservatism and Militant Loyalism, 1789-1815', in H T Dickinson, Britain and the French Revolution, 1789-1815 (London 1989), esp. pp.112-115; John Caulfield, The Reeves Association: A Study of Loyalism in the 1790s (Ph.D Thesis, Reading, 1988), p.278-80.

Colley and many others[2], that burnings were spontaneous or reflective of the independent will of the lower orders, will be challenged. Both mass membership and mass participation at effigy burnings were manifestations of the Reevesite rejection of exclusivity and its quest for active support amongst the wider public, and the discussion here is an empirical preface to the examination of inclusive language in chapter four. The emphasis is then shifted to the formal and informal means by which Reevesism combated, and is supposed to have largely defeated, political radicalism. This active anti-jacobinism was a further expression of Association inclusivity, for it encouraged amateur surveillance, denouncements, boycotts and information-gathering on an unprecedentedly wide scale. The section will involve some assessment of the true extent and nature of Reevesite repression and the reliability of historical accounts which play down the judicial harassment of radicalism.

Subscriptions and the 'Voluntary' Impulse

The Bath Association's 'membership' or signature book was left for public signing at the Guildhall for two weeks and then moved to the offices of a circulating library. The 6,143 signatures it attracted in just two months made the Bath RA one of the largest in the country[3]. But

2. For Bawn and Randall, see below. For Colley see 'Whose Nation? Class and National Consciousness in Britain, 1750-1830', Past and Present, 113 (1986), p.109, which talks of 'spontaneous generation from below'.
3. Bath Reeves Association Signature Book, Bath Guildhall Record Office; John Caulfield, The Reeves

although those who signed were referred to by the press and the Association as 'members', we have no evidence that they did anything else and they certainly paid no subscriptions. An informal system of voluntary contributions, organised entirely separately from the book signing, kept the Association financially solvent. Neither the minute book nor the press record the recommended amount to be given by subscribers, but whatever the sum it is unlikely to have fallen within the budget of most 'loyal subjects'. The most recent historian of the Reeves Movement, John Caulfield, believes the minimum sum permitted at nearby Frome, 2s 6d, was uncommonly low[4], although many rank and file loyalists were undoubtedly still encouraged to make small donations as a symbol of their involvement.

Linda Colley has argued that both Reevesism and governmental appeals for financial support for the war effort consciously rejected gestures of mass inclusivity as 'impolitic': 'The only outlet for popular nationalism which the British government felt able safely and consistently to encourage... was the cult of the monarchy'[5]. This is nonsense. When the West Wiltshire militia was being reorganised in 1794 and another subscription raised, the common people were called upon

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Association: A Study of Loyalism in the 1790s, (Ph.D thesis, Reading 1988), p.40.

4. Bath Reeves Association Minute Book, Bath Guildhall Record Office; Caulfield, op cit., p.30.
5. Linda Colley, 'Whose Nation?', op cit., p.109.

to understand that the smallest sums would be acceptable, not because the money is wanted, but to encourage the spirit of patriotism amongst all orders, and Mr Awdry improved upon it by moving that the clergy be requested to promote and solicit subscriptions in their respective parishes[6]

The promotion and solicitation of 'loyal' subscriptions such as these appeared to place little faith in 'the spirit of patriotism' as a motivating force on its own, however. Subscriptions that were not widely supported to begin with by the elite classes might draw negligible support from their social inferiors and present little excuse for Reevesite coercion to be brought to bear. Such subscriptions, like that initiated by the Mayor of Bath in 1796 to help meet the costs of the war, were prone to ignominious failure, regardless of their loyal object. The Bath fund was launched without a public meeting because the mayor was afraid of its being hi-jacked by hostile factions to make anti-war propaganda, and attracted only two subscribers, one of whom was the mayor himself. Within a month it had been formally dissolved[7]. The role of the clergy in co-ordinating drives for mass donations was often crucial to their success. This was never better demonstrated than in the promotion of the government's (much more successful) national appeal for injections of cash to the Bank of England in 1798, to

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6. Savernake Estate Papers WRO 1300/4639, Ms Report of a Militia meeting at Devizes, April 1794.
7. Bath Herald 10/12/1796, 17/12/1796 & 31/12/1796.

help meet the spiralling costs of the war. At Bristol for example, ministers, church wardens and vestry committees were asked to act as parish sub-committees

> to solicit and collect the Contributions of every Individual in the respective parishes... and it be recommended to such parochial committees to receive the SMALLEST sums as Testimonies of the Zeal and Attachment of the contributors to our GLORIOUS CONSTITUTION.

In short, <u>everyone</u> was to be prevailed upon to pay something or be charged with disaffection. Introducing this scheme, the Bristol launch committee of major merchants, bankers and the Corporation, made quite clear their opinion that

> It is incumbent on EVERY INDIVIDUAL who is attached to our GLORIOUS CONSTITUTION to stand forward in its defence[8].

A contributor to <u>Bonner & Middleton's Bristol Journal</u> who called himself 'An Englishman of the Old Sort', was typical of many in insisting that

> every contributor, even of a shilling, ought to be enrolled in the list of true patriots and lovers of their country[9].

And so they were. <u>Bonner & Middleton's</u>, in common with other papers, published weekly lists of those who donated to the fund, and a full inventory was later published as a thick pamphlet. The roll of honour included £500 from

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8. <u>Bonner & Middleton's Bristol Journal</u> 24/2/1798.
9. <u>Bonner & Middleton's Bristol Journal</u> 17/3/1798.

the mayor, £34 from an unspecified number of Kingswood Colliers, four guineas from 'Mr Trip's Journeymen and Women', a shilling from 'Loyal Jack' and 6d from James Fudge, 'an aged labourer'[10]. The demonstration of one's loyalism had become a matter of public record.

It was no different in country districts like Burrington in Somerset, where the Parish vestry called for 'the small pittance of the farmer, the servant or the labourer' and ordered that 'the name of each subscriber and the amount of his contribution be posted up against the church door'[11]. Thus, whilst 'loyalism' was the pretext for payment, the motor which drove the engine would appear to have been fear of exposure as a non-payer, and the assumption that those who <u>had</u> paid would resent the abstention. Vestry committees, it needs hardly to be stated, were also responsible for allocating poor relief and assessing the 'deserving' poor of the parish. Loyalist subscriptions like these were about as 'voluntary' as putting out a fire in one's own home[12].

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10. <u>A List of Subscribers to the Fund for the Defence of the Country</u>, in Bristol Tracts 14057, Bristol Public Library. The Bristol fund eventually raised more than £33,000.
11. <u>Bonner & Middleton's Bristol Journal</u> 14/4/1798.
12. Lord Grenville had actually opposed the idea of the 'Voluntary Contribution' when it was first mooted because it would be 'in reality extorted by popular clamour and prejudice': quoted by Clive Emsley, <u>British Society and the French Wars, 1793-1815</u>, (London 1979), pp.70-71.
The demarkation by social class displayed in the list of subscribers at Seend however, makes it very clear that although poor labourers were enjoined to donate a shilling to the fund, the two who did were hardly as representative of the attitudes of their class as, for instance, the farmers (of whom 21 out of 25

But whether their subscriptions were strictly voluntary or not (and I am not suggesting that financial contributions to Reeves Associations were pursued as fiercely as in the above cases, since RAs were not after all as expensive to run as the government's war effort), for the bulk of RA members it was the only active commitment they would make to the movement. They were certainly not invited to take part in the running of RA affairs. Even at Frome where 'the populace under the room of meeting were very numerous', only a select handful of gentlemen were permitted into the room itself. A meeting of the Bath RA was actually cancelled when the organisers discovered that persons unknown had been

> inviting the attendance of all descriptions and proposing topics for discussion the most likely to produce debate and confusion[13].

The role of the ordinary member or supporter was to cheerfully consume refreshments at Paine effigy-burning ceremonies and return home in an orderly manner[14].

RA effigy-burnings and their social context

John Caulfield is not the first historian to recognise the importance of symbolic theatre in loyalist

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subscribed one or two guneas each). See Edward Bradby, 'Seend Contra Napoleon, 1798', Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine, 77 (1983), p.110.

13. Reeves Papers, BL Add Ms 16921, Derham and Stroud to Moore, 8/12/1792
14. Reeves Papers, BL Add. Ms 16922, Horner to Moore 15/12/1792

propaganda, nor the role of the Paine effigy burnings - the first act of virtually every RA in the winter of 1792-93 - in fulfilling that function[15]. Unfortunately however, effigy burning as a ceremonial form in popular cultural tradition and the apparent willingness of crowds to approve a diversity of political and social targets at various times is rarely explored. The activities of the Association and its crowd should be, but are usually not, considered in this context.

The Associations carefully situated their anti-Painite rituals within the bounds of established popular practice. The mock trials and executions of Paine, with all their costumed pageantry, processions and bonfires were closely, and probably intentionally, related to the annual Gunpowder Treason Day revels of the protestant calendar. Taking their cue partly from a desire to supplant the yearly debauchery of the Hallowe'en fire festival, and partly from a wish to institutionalise popular anti-catholicism, the architects of the seventeenth century puritan revolution modelled November 5th to serve particular political ends.

Effigies of Fawkes had been more or less universally replaced by effigies of his diabolical master, the Pope, by the turn of the century, as the annual ceremony adopted increasingly elaborate theatrical forms. The papal effigy, decked out in all the symbolic

15. J Caulfield, op cit., pp.123-132

paraphernalia of Catholicism, would be paraded through the streets, mocked, hanged, and finally burned on bonfires stoked with seized catholic literature. The benevolent owning class indulged the common people with free alcoholic nourishment, and dug into their pockets to pay for costumes and fireworks. It was an understandably popular autumn festival, not only because it was an invitation to get noisily drunk on someone else's money, but because Catholicism had come to encapsulate English fears of invasion by greedy authoritarian foreign powers, and the devious wish to subvert and corrupt our constitutional superiority. To the popular mind, Gunpowder Treason pope burnings may have exorcised 'authority' in the abstract, as well as Vatican ambition in the particular.

The Guy Fawkes Night traditions noted by Robert Storch as a nineteenth century development, 'an occasion on which the local social order could be criticised, current evils decried and unpopular figures vilified'[16], were already in place a century earlier. At Bristol, where Gunpowder Treason and the Torbay landing were taken together as an occasion for official civic ceremony and procession to the cathedral, the labouring poor held their own, less

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16. R D Storch, 'Popular Festivity and Consumer Protest: Food Price Disturbances in the South West and Oxfordshire in 1867', Albion Vol 14 (1982), p.210. Storch lists likely targets as 'officious policemen, local officials, grocers who gave short weight, bakers who sold inferior bread, unpopular employers,' etc. The 1867 food riots were triggered by the legitimation of bonfire night.

dignified, bonfire parties in parallel. In 1792, they selected the city's prostitutes for punishment (whether on grounds of high prices or immorality one can only guess), ransacking two brothels in Tower Lane for furniture to use as fuel for the fires[17]. In the early eighteenth century, provincial English catholics quickly learned to fear the advent of November - a month when street beatings and shattered windows loomed large. It was a time when, as David Cressy has observed, 'the vocabulary of celebration became a vocabulary of venom, a weapon against political and religious enemies'[18].

How appropriate then, that the Association movement chose this particular form of symbolic punishment for Paine and his disciples. Paine was not, of course, a catholic but a deist, but by burning his effigy in the traditional anti-catholic way, democrats became linked by association with the subversive aims of Catholicism. It was not so much what they were as what they were not - respectable supporters of the existing spiritual and temporal order. People who still knew very little about Thomas Paine were content to endorse a burning ceremony that cast him in the shape of the papal anti-christ, a circumstance that sowed confusion amongst those advocates of the French

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17. Felix Farley's Bristol Journal 8/11/1792.
18. See David Underdown, Revel, Riot and Rebellion: Popular Culture and Politics in England 1603-60, (Oxford 1985), pp.70-72; and David Cressy, Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England (London 1989), pp.175-184 and 202-6.

Revolution who had been so fervently promoting Louis 16th in that very same role[19].

Thanks to the happy coincidence of the Torbay landing falling on November 4th[20] in 1688, the patriotic constitutionalism and anti-corruption themes of Gunpowder Treason night developed a fresh resonance during the eighteenth century. After Admiral Vernon's victory at Porto Bello in 1740, the chance co-incidence of the great man's birthday with the above two events led to its inclusion in the cycle of festivities at Bristol and elsewhere. Vernon represented more than simple patriotism however, for he was also associated with anti-ministerialism and the rejection of foppery and patronage[21]. But if the massive and popular Torbay landing Jubilee pageants of 1788 were topped by the efforts of the radical/dissenting Revolution Society, as Schwoener has suggested, complete with fire, symbolism,

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19. It was also true however that effigy-burning had become such a common form of demonstrative popular 'justice', that crowd targets might just as easily include unpopular employers and rulers as foreign enemies of British sovereignty. For local examples see Jonathan Barry, The Social Life of Bristol, 1640-1775, (Ph.D thesis, Oxford 1985), p.231 (for a master weaver); Bath Chronicle 23/6/1785 (for a Prime Minister); Bath Herald 28/3/1795 (for a tithe collector); and Bath Herald 16/7/1796 & 21/7/1796 (for a master carpenter).
20. Some towns insisted that the correct date was the 5th, and newspapers ocassionally joined the debate, the Salisbury Journal for example arguing in 1788 that the 4th was the best date since that was also William's birthday: Salisbury Journal 10/11/1788.
21. Gerald Jordan and Nicholas Rogers, 'Admirals as Heroes: Patriotism and Liberty in Hanoverian England', Journal of British Studies No.28, (July 1989), pp.203-10.

costumes and processions[22], the great success of the RA movement four years later was to appropriate the pro-Liberty constitutional tradition popularised by bonfire-making and turn it against the Rights of Man.

A central problem for the Association movement lay in converting the public's perception of fire festivals from an evening of inversion and chaos to an evening of decorum and order - in effect, to reformulate the respectable pageantry of the 1788 Revolution Jubilee for mass participation. This would necessitate a more benign attitude to crowd culture than the ruling elite were accustomed to. Lord Ailesbury's condemnation of attempts by crowds at Chippenham and Marlborough to protest against the introduction of the Winchester bushel (by burning effigies of local farmers at the end of November 1792) as unacceptable disorders, sat somewhat uncomfortably with his encouragement of Paine burnings a fortnight later[23].

The process of accommodation required something of an imaginative leap, for there is little indication that mass involvement in the 1788 celebrations had been much welcomed in the South West. At Bristol, the main event was the annual civic procession and banquet, a military cannonade on Brandon Hill, and the decoration of William's statue in Queen Square with a 'handsome

22. L Schwoener, op cit., pp.5-6
23. Savernake Estate Papers WRO 1300/2263, Ward to Ailesbury 22/11/1792, Wiltshire County Record Office.

canopy', inscription, and coloured lamps. The magistrates expressly forbade fireworks in public places and 'desired' there to be no illuminations since 'illuminating houses and throwing fireworks may be productive of dangerous consequences'. In the event, whether sanctioned or not, an evening bonfire was lit on Brandon Hill[24]. There were bonfires and fireworks incorporated into the celebrations at Salisbury and Devizes, but at both of these towns, the Jubilee was held on the 5th, Gunpowder treason night, rather than on the 4th as at Bristol or Trowbridge - where bell-ringing and a banquet for the town's principal inhabitants was considered sufficient. At Bath, where magistrates were still haunted by the memory of the Gordon Riots, there is no evidence of Jubilee celebrations of any kind[25]. Newspaper editors, accustomed as they were to complaining about the annual disorder of Gunpowder Treason night, were emphatic in their insistence that the Jubilee had been a very different affair; an occasion generally of 'unanimity, harmony and conviviality'. At Devizes, where the mass had been indulged with fireworks and free beer:

> all ranks of people (were) most heartily united in celebrating this glorious event, yet the utmost regularity and decorum prevailed[26].

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24. Felix Farley's Bristol Journal 1/11/1788; 8/11/1788; Bonner & Middleton's Bristol Journal 8/11/1788.
25. Salisbury Journal 10/11/1788; Bath Chronicle 6/11/1788.
26. Salisbury Journal 10/11/1788

In many towns, official attitudes to plebeian activity on November 5th remained unchanged in subsequent years. By and large, magistrates continued to threaten legal action against anyone caught letting off fireworks in public places, and fell in - by appearance at least - with Felix Farleys' view that

> the riots and disorders which annually prevail in the principal and central streets of this city on the evening of the fifth of this month surely deserve the serious attention of the magistrates[27].

But some change in attitudes is suggested by newspaper coverage in and after 1792 - the year of the Royal Proclamation against sedition, and the rise of the Reeves Association movement. At Bath, the annual insertions from the magistrates against fireworks, which had run from before 1788, suddenly stopped. At Bristol, a similar pattern emerged. Not only did the legal warnings stop in 1792, but newspaper reports of November 5th Gunpowder Treason/1688 anniversary celebrations abruptly changed. According to Bonner & Middleton's, the customary civic procession and bell-ringing were augmented in 1792, 1793 and 1794 by 'bonfires and fireworks in several parts of the city', indicating that as the RA movement gathered pace, the participation of the mass in constitutional festivities began to find official endorsement, or tolerance at least[28]. One learns for instance, that the

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27. Felix Farley's Bristol Journal 6/11/1790.
28. Exceptions indicate the need to be wary of blanket generalisations however. Regulation warnings to the good citizens of Wells not to let off fireworks in the vicinity of the cathedral appeared in 1795 for

celebrations held at Bath to mark the King's birthday in June were the biggest and most lavish ever and involved a crowd of over 2000 for the fireworks and illuminations[29].

Borough authorities were beginning to recognise a potential in festivals like these for influencing the construction of popular political consensus, provided they could be regulated and 're-made' in an orderly manner. This is certainly what was going on in the formulation of the Paine-burning ceremonies in 1792, although it is equally true that not all provincial authorities were convinced they were a good idea. There were disturbances and clashes with reformers at Taunton on the night Paine's effigy was burned[30], and at Bath the Corporation banned a burning, forcing the RA to relocate it outside the borough boundary. The same fate befell an RA-inspired attempt to burn an effigy of the Duc d'Orleans in the city in February 1793; this time

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instance: Wells Cathedral Misc. Add Ms 2419, SCRO. At Warminster in 1803, another year of Loyalist fervour and apprehensions about French Invasion plans, an unfortunate cleric became one of the very few recorded victims of anti-firework festival laws when a prosecution was taken out against him for assisting and encouraging a crowd to build a bonfire and let off squibs on his paddock on November 5th. But arguably, by this time, the perceived threat to public morals from the influence of 'republicans and levellers' had subsided to such an extent, and the substitution of mass Volunteering for the less orderly constitutional November festivals had been such a success, that attitudes to bonfire night crowds were reverting to their traditional antipathy See case against Rev John Griffith, Assi 24/43, Wilts Lent Assize 1804.

29. Bath Register 9/6/1792.
30. This claim was made in a report carried by the opposition Morning Chronicle and cited in Caulfield, op cit., p.132.

resulting in a burning two miles away on Solsbury Hill, well away from all populated areas. The effigy was permitted to remain inside the city for a few days prior to the ceremony, but only for display purposes, and at North Parade - not in the centre where a crowd might be more likely to gather[31]. In 1794, they permitted a loyalist illumination to celebrate Lord Howe's naval victory but only after some debate; banned illuminations when the Duke of York visited in 1795; and refused permission for another after Nelson's victory at the Nile in 1798[32]. Reporting on the Trowbridge and Bradford burnings, Capt Craufurd could barely conceal his surprise and relief that 'not a groan or a hiss was uttered' throughout the evening despite the presence 'in those places of some of the most violent levellers'. Although he had organised these himself, Craufurd almost banned his own soldiers from attending because exposure to radical discussion had created problems of 'severe indiscipline'[33].

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31. Bath Journal 25/2/1792. D'Orleans, who had been elected to the National Assembly in 1789 and who voted for the death of the King, was presumably singled out for popular opprobrium because it was perceived that he had betrayed his class. He was a cousin of the King. The guillotine claimed his head later in 1793.
32. Bath Herald 22/12/1792; Bath Journal 16/6/1794; Bath Chronicle 12/11/1795; Jordan and Rogers, op cit., p.216. A Paine burning was also banned by the Corporation at Salisbury, but by and large such fears were a product of urban social instability and burnings were not obstructed in the rural areas: Salisbury Journal 24/12/1792.
33. HO 42/23, Craufurd to Dundas 20/12/1792.

The quest for crowd order was reflected in the effort and expense invested in hierarchical symbolism at many Paine burnings. Plebeians were accorded the status of spectators rather than participants. At Batheaston, where the effigy was tried 'before a court of respectable freeholders', the procession comprised one company of Queens Bays with drums and trumpets, the High Sheriff, two spearmen, 24 javelin men, two mace-bearers, two dragoons, a band of music and a choir, military colours, a protestant clergyman and a catholic priest, two high constables, 24 petty constables and 'numerous respectable freeholders'[34]. This was not the traditional plebeian mock-trial and effigy burning ceremony with its inverted role-playing and rough music, but a bastardisation of it which 'righted' the inversion principle and reinforced oligarchical values[35]. At Wells, an authentic hangman performed the execution, and both there and at Shepton Mallet proceedings began with the gates of the town gaol opening and the prison authorities passing Paine's effigy out for execution[36]. The cautious Capt. Craufurd assured Home Secretary Dundas of the efforts he had made to prevent indiscipline:

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34. See Bath Herald 14/2/1793.
35. This may not universally have been the case. A newspaper report claims that Paine was burned at Kingswood by the 'colliers' after a procession through Bristol led by Sunday School children and featuring at least one 'mock' clergyman. It is impossible to tell whether these colliers were pit-owners and managers, artisans and labourers, or both of course. Neither is it clear that the majority of colliers either endorsed or took part in the event: Felix Farley's Bristol Journal 2/3/1793.
36. Bath Chronicle 17/1/1793, Bath Herald 12/1/1793

> Notwithstanding our mirth and festivity... I did not admit the doctrine of equality for a moment. I kept to our invariable rule and made the non-commissioned officers, even to the lance corporals and rough riders, assemble in a separate room from the privates[37].

The defence of the Constitution may have seemed an admirable pretext for the consumption of large quantities of free refreshments, and large attendances were virtually guaranteed. These were not dry political occasions and there were no didactic speeches to be endured[38]. Rather

> All the inns freely distributed liquor, and the town at large, and the neighbouring gentry, contributed handsomely to keep up the spirit of loyalty[39].

One might question however, whether 'loyalty' as the RA understood it, had anything much to do with the popularity of the event. Few will actually have read Paine by this time and received wisdom came mainly from the hostile press or the RA. At Warminster, the Association's proposed burning met with immediate local objections from people who thought the intended victim was an innocent town butcher - the only Tom Paine they

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37. HO 42/23, Craufurd to Dundas 20/12/1792.
38. Although the good people of Batheaston were treated to a sermon from their clergyman at the start of the evening. Bath Journal 4/2/1792.
39. Bath Register 12/1/1793, commenting on a Paine burning at Marshfield, Wilts.

knew[40]. And this was not the only misunderstanding. In another Wiltshire village, a fiddler was burned in effigy when it became clear he was willing to attend the RA's event, but did not wish to play 'God Save the King' at it, whilst at Saltford a burning had to be abandoned when someone stole the effigy[41]. Privately, many gentlemen were acutely aware that the impressive displays of Loyalism being engineered at the Paine burnings were not always a true reflection of public concerns. The Earl of Ailesbury's agent at Savernake was moved to admit:

> Our labourers and indeed some of our farmers know but little about politics or constitutions, an instance of which happened here by farmer Piper of Wilton, who instead of drinking my first standing toast after dinner, drank to the King, Lords and Commons of Great Bedwin; and one of his commentators, in explaining the toast, took it for granted that the two first meant his majesty and your lordship (and I believe Lord Bruce was included), and supposed that the last part of the toast was for success for the late enclosure of the commons in Great Bedwin[42].

Misgivings were not confined to the ignorance or unpredictability of the crowd. There was also a fear that

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40. True Briton 14/1/1793, a story cited by Caulfield, op cit., p.126
41. Bath Chronicle 17/1/1793 and 24/1/1793
42. Savernake Estate Papers, WRO 1300/2295, John Ward to The Earl of Ailesbury, 4/1/1793, Wiltshire County Record Office. Lord Bruce was Ailesbury's son and heir.

radicals, who were by no means all in a defensive mood by this stage, could use the event to their own advantage - the very fear that had caused the Bath Association to cancel its first meeting. Some radicals were certainly optimistic about the possibilities of subversion. The UB organiser at Bristol in 1798, Robert Watson, believed:

> The friends of government should be extremely cautious in employing their Church and King mobs.... In the west of England, a pensioner of the Court lately engaged a few unlettered men to burn the effigy of Thomas Paine for a barrel of Porter - when they had accomplished this heroic exploit, they asked his honour if he had any more bishops to burn: and it is supposed they would have willingly paid them, and certain other great men, the honours of martyrdom for a very small quantity indeed[43].

High attendances were officially considered proof of popular political consensus - an assumption shared by many latter-day historians. Having dismissed as unlikely the possibility that radical ideas had much currency amongst the region's woollen workers, Adrian Randall declares with confidence that 'the great majority... preferred to burn effigies of Paine to demonstrate their loyalty to the crown', (my emphasis) but he does not

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43. Robert Watson, The Life of Lord George Gordon, With a Philosophical View of his Conduct (London 1795), footnote on p.51.

investigate the issues of motive or persuasion[44]. K P Bawn is convinced, although it is not at all clear why, that the crowds who watched Paine-burnings in Dorset were 'large and genuinely loyal'. So loyal in fact, that he attributes 18 of the county's 22 burnings to 'the population acting on their own behalf'. According to Bawn

> In a number of places, Thomas Paine's effigy was burned with little or no encouragement or stage management by the respectable classes,

a surprisingly credulous statement. The four odd ones were organised by the military, so for Bawn the RAs and 'the population' appear to have become one and the same[45]. Where evidence does survive of the way in which 'spontaneous' Paine burnings were organised, we see the substantial involvement of the landed gentry. The Great Bedwin burning mentioned above for example, was suggested by the village Portreeve to Lord Ailesbury's agent, John Ward. Ward passed the suggestion on to Ailesbury for approval and asked for advice. Ailesbury commended the proposal, sent him 'an excellent John Bull handbill which accompanies the other patriotic publications on the market house, church doors etc.', vetted his draft resolutions for a preparatory RA meeting, and promised to send some venison for distribution to the revellers[46].

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44. Adrian Randall, Before the Luddites, Custom, Community and Machinery in the English Woollen Industry 1776-1809, (Cambridge 1991), p.273.
45. K P Bawn, Social Protest, Popular Disturbances and Public Order in Dorset, 1790-1838 (Ph.D thesis, Reading, 1984), pp.203, 209, and 232.
46. Savernake Estate Papers, WRO 1300/2260 & 2295, Ward to Ailesbury 7/12/1792 & 4/1/1793.

As I have already suggested, the idea that the Paine burnings represented a useful index to the state of public opinion is not a good one; but I am not in any case happy with the figures presented for attendance. Assessments of the crowd vary from 'the principle gentleman farmers and inhabitants' (Lymington), 'a numerous multitude' (Bath), 'many hundreds' (West Horrington), to 'five thousand' (Marlborough)[47]. At Trowbridge, the Bath Herald and the local RA counted 500 people forming an Association, whilst the officer commanding the attending dragoons saw 2000 whom he was only prepared to describe as 'spectators'[48]. Whilst either figure is perfectly possible, one is reminded of Professor Christie's firm rebuttal of the large attendances claimed by some at the outdoor meetings of the LCS in 1795; and that assessments of support must inevitably be hinged upon the number of presumed passive sightseers. 'The idea that there was any mass support in London for the London Corresponding Society may be consigned to oblivion', was his conclusion[49]. Applying a similar scepticism to our assessment of loyalism, we may wonder at the true size of the 'crowd' that assembled to burn Paine's effigy at the tiny hamlet of Babington,

47. Bath Herald 23/12/1792; Bath Chronicle 20/12/1792, 31/1/1793, and 17/1/1793
48. Bath Herald 15/12/1792; Reeves Papers Add.Ms 16922 Timbrell to Reeves, 11/12/1792; HO 42/23, Craufurd to ?, 20/12/1792. The population of Trowbridge in 1801 was 5,800.
49. I R Christie, Stress and Stability in Eighteenth Century Britain: Reflections on Britain's Avoidance of Revolution, (Oxford 1984), p.50

Somerset in January 1793. What Babington did have was the country house of an important landed family (the Knatchbulls) and it was for this reason that it hosted an effigy burning. The surprisingly large number of burnings at small isolated settlements like this reads like a gazetteer to the stately piles of the gentry. The newspapers show that Reeves Associations were rarely formed in any two nearby towns on the same date. Attendance at an inauguration/burning could therefore be maximised if only participants were willing to travel and drink free beer in neighbouring villages. One assumes that they were, for there is no other way of explaining the appearance of 5000 revellers at Marlborough - a number more than twice the total population of the borough[50].

RA Membership & Support

A close analysis of the Bath RA's membership book reveals something of the manner in which this impressive document was compiled. Some appear to have signed at the prompting of their employers. The architect John Eveleigh committed the names of his entire workforce - a total of 156 men - each name entered in an identical hand. John Ford, the Milk Street machine maker, personally signed for thirty of his men under the heading 'All Loyal Subjects God Save the King!'. The workforce from five breweries, three

50. Victoria County History of Wiltshire (Vol 4), population tables pp.339-361. The population in 1801 was 2,367.

coachbuilding manufactories, a shoemakers, a printshop, a saddlery and a stone-carvers yard were all entered in a similar way. In all there were 471 identifiable collective signings of this type. Employers were to marshal their workers like this again during the Volunteering boom of 1803 when

> Sixteen honest sons of St Crispin have just been taken down by their employer, Mr James Phipps of St Margarets Buildings, and entered as Volunteers[51].

Whilst the evidence of collective signings draws attention to a likelihood of workplace coercion, there is no way of knowing how freely the bulk of the workers made their decisions to sign. A total of 1,743 included details of their trade. By far the largest occupation group represented was the building industry (580 names). Since it had been the largest employer of labour in the city for at least a decade, it may not be surprising, but in 1793 the trade was sliding fast into a recession. Workers clinging to and competing for a diminishing supply of jobs could ill-afford to allow prospective employers to doubt their loyalty - although John Eveleigh's public display of loyalism saved neither himself not his workforce; he went bankrupt later that year. The 234 Bath recruits into the army during the opening days of war with France (February 1793) were drawn predominantly from the ranks of laid-off building

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51. Bath Herald 23/7/1803. The Herald's editor, William Meyler, was an ex-secretary of the Bath Reeves Association.

workers[52], and by the summer 'more than a thousand bricklayers and labourers in stone and mortar' were thought to have enlisted. 'No class of traders, considered one newspaper, 'has (the war) so much injured as the builders. Four fifths of these men are absolutely ruined'[53]. Enlistment carried not only the security of paid work, but additional bounties from Corporations and some RAs. In February 1793, Bath Corporation offered a 40s bonus to every able bodied seaman who volunteered for service, or 20s to every ordinary seaman. In May, 10gns was offered to each man enlisting into the army. At Devizes, the Loyal Association's pledge of 2gns to the first 50 who would join the navy brought an immediate positive response from 46 men, and Bristol Corporation paid out a total of £700 in bounties to recruits during the first days of the war[54]. There is no evidence that workers from other specific trades flocked to the army at Bath, although 150 unemployed workers in the similarly floundering woollen trade at Frome were said to have enlisted in March[55], and the figure had risen to 800 by the end of the famine year of 1795[56].

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52. See Daily Courier 19/3/1793: 'Recruiting (in Bath) has succeeded wonderfully - at the expense of the builders who are nearly ruined'.
53. Courier, 1/7/1793 and 24/9/1793. The summer total of enlisted builders would appear to have represented a very substantial proportion of total number from all trades. In mid-April, the overall total was put at 1600 men; Bath Register 13/4/1793.
54. Bath Register 23/2/1793, 2/3/1793, 24/3/1793 & 11/5/1793; Latimer, Annals of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century (Bristol 1893), p.500.
55. Courier 20/3/1793. Poverty caused by unemployment in the woolen trade was acute by the following winter at Trowbridge, Devizes, Melksham and Chippenham;

The next best represented group of workers in the signature book are 301 domestic servants, including coachmen, gardeners and butlers. Along with the 324 sedan chairmen who signed a separate declaration of loyalty in December 1792, these men worked in the most obviously deferential sector imaginable, and it may be considered once again that here was a loyalism coloured by expedience. As the chairmen put it themselves,

> We are conscious that our livelihood and the happiness of ourselves and families depends entirely upon the prosperity and peace of the kingdom in general and of this city in particular[57].

Despite the symbolic deference of their employment, the Bath chairmen were by no means poor. Many were 'possessing considerable property' and had a clear financial stake in the maintenance of the status quo[58]. A further 287 men signed the book but admitted they were not residents of Bath. Most of these came from nearby towns and neighbouring parishes like the 23 from Box or the 22 from Bristol. But some came from further afield - from Kent, Surrey, Suffolk, London, Manchester, Leicester, Dublin, Portsmouth, Cambridge and Scotland.

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see Felix Farley's Bristol Journal 1/2/1794, & 2/2/1794.

56. Adrian Randall, Before the Luddites: Custom, Community and Machinery in the English Woollen Industry, 1776-1809 (Cambridge 1991), p.197.
57. The original text of the chairmen's declaration was widely reproduced in the local press, but the original can be seen at the back of the RA Membership Book.
58. Bath Register, 15/12/1792.

Some, like the future Alderman and author of anti-Jacobin tracts, Edward Harington, signed the book twice for good measure. Thomas Horner signed the Bath book as well as his own at Frome where, as landlord of Mells Park, he was chair of another RA. Whole pages of the Bath book were clearly entered in the same hand. This is because three RA Committee members attended the Guildhall each day to sign by proxy for men they knew, or to assist those who came but were unable to write their own names[59]. At Bridgwater, Tom Poole saw a similar book filled in the most provocative manner, with the magistrate Richard Symes 'sitting on the Cornhill with a table before him, receiving the oaths of loyalty to the King'[60]. At Taunton, those suspected of disaffection were being harassed by a 'very clever' agent of the RA who intimidated them until 'those persons who till lately spoke freely are now become apparently (my emphasis) very loyal and join the Associations'[61]. Their change of heart, it may be supposed, was not unconnected with the mobbing they had received from a loyalist crowd on Paine burning night.

Bath's publicans, in common with their counterparts in many towns throughout England, drew up their own loyal

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59. Bath Reeves Association Minute Book; Caulfield, op cit., p.44; Public Advertiser 31/12/1792
60. H Sandford, Thomas Poole and his Friends (London 1888), Vol 1, p.36. Poole's antagonism towards the activities of his local RA marked him as 'a kind of political Ishmaelite in his own neighbourhood' (p.34)
61. TS11/1007/4053, Southey and Beadon to Chamberlaine and White, 23/12/1792

declaration which promised to prevent all radical meetings on their premises, and to inform the authorities of any seditious remarks they might overhear being made by customers. But this was no spontaneous outburst of affection for the government. They had been carefully primed by the Bath Association's

> judicious recommendations of a Line of Conduct, which the said Innkeepers and Victuallers had, in some measure, in their own minds, anticipated[62].

These 'recommendations' were backed in turn by a resolution of the County Justices, passed at the Wells Quarter Sessions

> that we will, in our respective divisions, recommend it most earnestly to the several innkeepers to discourage and prevent all clubs and societies of disaffected persons[63].

Failure to respond could be interpreted as an unwillingness to comply, and any publican in that position risked forfeiture of his licence in the Spring. At Bristol it was suggested at the end of December 1792 that JPs should

> <u>invariably</u> deny a licence to every publican who does not bring the most <u>positive</u> proof that no <u>Republican</u> or <u>Jacobin</u> club has <u>hitherto</u> been held at his house

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62. <u>Bath Publicans' Address</u> 20/12/1792, printed copy preserved in Minute Book of the Bath Association.
63. <u>H.O 42/24</u>, resolution of the Justices and Lord Lieutenant, 16/1/1793. This same resolution also reminded every 'good citizen' of his 'Duty to make a public declaration of his political sentiments' - In other words, to sign the Association's book.

and who does not most unequivocally declare that no such shall be held there in future.

In less than a week, the Bristol innkeepers had met and passed a resolution vowing just that[64]. And if the experience of Bristol's innkeepers was anything to go by, the pressure did not stop after 1793. Rather, a useful precedent had been established which the authorities and Associators would continue to use for as long as the battle to muzzle radicalism lasted. In 1795, Coleridge found it virtually impossible to find an inn at Bristol at which it was possible to hire a room to deliver lectures, because

> within the last three weeks, a circular letter has been sent to the publicans of this city, requiring them to exclude from their houses certain gentlemen whose names are underwritten and whom the letter styles 'damned Jacobin pests of society' etc. etc[65].

A similar kind of pressure was applied to the members of Bath's trade benefit societies. The government's Friendly Societies Act of 1793 had sought to control the activities of benefit societies by offering legal protection and a licence to any whose rule book met with the approval of the County bench. The master printer, William Gye approached seven Bath societies in the winter of 1793, offering to draw up and present to the bench on their behalf such rules as would find favour with the

64. Felix Farley's Bristol Journal 29/12/1793, 5/1/1793.
65. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, An Answer to a Letter to Edward Long Fox (Bristol 1795).

Justices. He persuaded each society to adopt a pledge that they would fine any member the sum of 10/6d if he was so much as accused of 'uttering or promoting seditious language'. And as the Bath Journal reported, the magistrates were most sympathetic:

> This clause met with the universal approbation of the court and it was instantly agreed that all clubs who introduced the same clause in future should have the sanction of the said court[66].

By 1800, all sixteen of the city's societies had adopted Gye's clause and won their licence, and some, like the Bath Loyal True Britons in 1794, had even chosen suitable titles[67].

This is the light in which we must learn to view Professor Christie's belief that Britain avoided revolution in the 1790s because life was characterised by 'social cohesion'. There is copious evidence for every appearance of popular consensus, but its validity would seem rather diminished if it was achieved only through coercion and intimidation. Cohesion then, in the

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66. Bath Journal 20/1/1794
67. See Rules and Orders... Of the Bath Loyal True Britons (Bath 1794). Displays of loyalism continued make sound sense for city workers. When thirteen benefit societies paraded to the Bath Guildhall to congratulate the mayor on Lord Howe's naval victory in June 1794, they were rewarded with 'many liberal donations from the inhabitants of this city to encourage the generous display of their loyalty', Bath Journal 16/6/1794. Represented societies included the Loyal United Walcot Society (motto: May the heirs of the Crown ever succeed); the Amicable Belvedere Society (motto: The Nation, The Law and the King; and the slightly more ambiguous Patriotic Society (no motto): Bath Journal 2/6/1794.

Reevesite sense in which Christie intends it, was not organic, inherent or spontaneous but constructed and imposed. Many west country communities were undoubtedly brought to heel by the Association movement, not just given a mouthpiece through which to express their loyalty. At the end of March 1793, a traveller found the once 'turbulent' reformers of Ilminster, Langport and Chard 'now peaceable and satisfied'. Chard's Association accepted that the townsfolk had previously been receptive to reform but, as at Taunton, the threat of prosecution for sedition had been broadcast and had 'evidently operated much to convince them of the necessity of a submission to the present established laws'[68]. The influence wielded by the 'principal inhabitants' of rural areas should never be under-estimated, but one might legitimately question the sincerity with which many of the common people bent the deferential knee. Comparisons may be drawn here with the reception given in some parts of the countryside to itinerant dissenting preachers in the late 1780s and early 90s. The Bath Congregationalist William Jay was not often met with hostility, but when he was:

> the excitement of the ignorant populace was commonly produced by the clergyman, the squire, and some of the stupid, intemperate farmers... The village

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68. Reeves Papers, BL Add. Ms 16925, Anon to Moore, 29/3/1793; Add. Ms 16920, Higgins to Moore, 1/12/1792

peasantry... if left to themselves seemed to drink in the word[69].

The men who caused an otherwise indifferent or supportive crowd of labourers to make a public show of their disapproval of Jay's 'innovative' behaviour, and express their support for Church and King, were precisely the same men who now turned their attentions against radicalism. The Wiltshire Baptist, Thomas Wastfield, recorded several instances of clergymen and farmers interrupting meetings during 1797 to threaten him with arrest, or to drag him before a magistrate for examination if he didn't desist from preaching in their village. Although both Wastfield and (probably) his antagonists knew very well that he was quite within the law, exchanges of this kind will have suggested to his hearers that his behaviour was not legal, and demonstrated that the village elders were not disposed to tolerate it. Itinerant preachers were invariably spared from popular opposition except where the landowning classes had briefed the populace in disruption[70].

The RAs and the unofficial oppression of radicalism

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69. Autobiography and Reminiscences of the Rev. William Jay (London 1854), p.38.
70. Deryck Lovegrove, Established Church, Sectarian People: Itinerancy and the Transformation of English Dissent 1780-1830, (Cambridge 1988). See for example, p.149, for the substantial success of itinerancy, and several passages from Wastfield's Journal, reprinted in the appendix, for the nature of his opposition, for example pp.166-7.

The RAs and the unofficial oppression of radicalism

> They (the RAs) certainly hunted for plots and certainly branded with that name what did not prove to be so. Of their effect upon society, the public must be left to judge (James Losh, 1797[71]).

To ease the subsequent identification of Bath's loyal and, by omission, disloyal citizens in 1792, the 6000 names and addresses collected in the RA Membership book were carefully copied out again in alphabetical order in a separate volume. The new list was then deposited at Meyler's Library 'for the inspection of such persons as may be desirous of perusing the same'[72]. The RA had created an invaluable directory for employment-vetting and whether at RA instigation or not, suspected radicals were certainly subjected to workplace harassment.

A Bath tailor, imprisoned for publishing the 'Rights of Man' in 1794 had previously been dismissed by a master who objected to his politics. A hairdresser and a printer, also gaoled that year, were informed against by other tradesmen for remarks they had made[73]. With the London RA and The Times jointly promoting a boycott

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71. Losh's annotation to his own published translation of Benjamin Constant, Observations on the Strength of The Present Government of France and Upon the Necessity of Rallying Round it (Bath 1797), p.99.
72. Also preserved at Bath Guildhall Record Office. Its formulation is recorded in the Minute Book, entries dated 26/1/1793 & 19/2/1793
73. George Papers, depositions and indictments against Bull, Wylde and Wilkinson 1794, Bath Guildhall Record Office.

campaign to oust Jacobin tradesmen from their employ, no one was secure. A purge of the Bath Theatre began after a man who had previously been connected with it was sacked from his job as secretary to the Catch Club for proposing a 'seditious toast'. Unless every reformer was wheedled out immediately, threatened the Archbishop of York and the Duke of Ancaster, 'no person of any character or distinction can be expected to support the theatre or any of its branches'[74]. The Reeves Association at Frome pounced upon a town bookseller for stocking radical as well as conservative titles and forced him to consign his entire stock to the bonfire for Paine's effigy[75].

John Campbell, the suspected secretary of Bath's Corresponding Society lost his job as editor of the Bath Register, was forced to stop selling the Courier and, according to Henry Hunt, had his house pulled down by a mob 'acting under authority' and his furniture taken 'which broke his heart'. Forced into bankruptcy, he left the city, and all within a few short months of his being informed against to the Home Office. Edward Harington, son of the mayor and author of several anti-jacobin tracts, boasted shortly after Campbell's departure that one seditious Bath bookseller (unnamed) had objected to his writings, but there was 'now not one factious or seditious bookseller in the LOYAL and PEACEABLE CITY OF

74. Bath Chronicle 4/1/1794; Times 8/1/1794; Bath Journal 24/2/1794. The 'seditious' words in the toast were 'the tree of Liberty'.
75. Reeves Papers, BL Add. Ms 16922, Horner to Moore, 15/12/1792.

OLD BATH!!!'[76]. A Bath lodging house keeper began passing details to the Home Office of anyone whose table conversation was 'contrary to my political principles'[77]. A Bristol merchant named Edward Bayly was rumoured to be disaffected for no better reason than that he had the same name as a man in London who had applied for French citizenship[78]. Two Bath men, one a prosperous linen-draper, the other the principal of a teaching academy, were compelled to place newspaper insertions protesting their innocence after fingers were pointed at them[79]. Neither had signed the book, but even John Ford who, it will be remembered had done so with something of a flourish, suffered from 'false and malicious rumours... to the great prejudice of his character and credit'[80].

The Bath Chronicle was concerned that innocent remarks made in coffee-houses were being willfully misrepresented by the maliciously inclined to settle personal disagreements. But this was only to be expected. From the start, the Bath RA had demanded the co-operation of

> all loyal and well-disposed persons to give the earliest information to this committee of any inflammatory writings or public declaration of a seditious tendency that may come to their knowledge.

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76. HO 42/30, Anon to Dundas, 12/5/1794; Bath Herald 12/7/1794, Bath Journal 10/11/1794. Hunt's claim is made in Memoirs of Henry Hunt Esq. Written by Himself in his Majesty's Gaol at Ilchester, 2, (London 1821) pp.43-4.
77. HO 42/31, Wm Davies to Nepean, 5/6/1794
78. Felix Farley's Bristol Journal 8/12/1792.
79. Bath Journal 9/6/1794; Bath Herald 14/6/1794
80. Bath Register 16/2/1793

'Seditious tendency' may have been open to wide interpretation. The Bath Register urged the process forward, assuring the public that 'informers against offenders of this class will receive the thanks of the whole community'. By 1795 a correspondent of the Bath Chronicle was singing the praises of the hair powder tax because, since jacobins would be loathe to contribute money to the war effort, they would now be identifiable by their 'lank hair and ragged heads'. This would greatly assist

> that large and useful body of men who derive an honourable subsistence from laying before or (vulgarly speaking) informing government of all words and actions spoken and committed against its welfare'[81].

The majority of these anti-jacobin denunciations were, it may be supposed, entirely without foundation. At Bath it had become

> quite the fashion when any person makes the least complaint on public matters or presumes to think or speak differently from a certain description of persons, to send anonymous letters to him, that if he does not hold his tongue, he shall be marked (for this is the phrase) as a Jacobin[82].

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81. Bath Journal 31/12/1792; Bath Register 16/12/1792 Bath Chronicle 27/12/1792; and 14/5/1795. These last remarks may have been committed in sarcasm, but Jacobins were known to leave their hair unpowdered as a 'well known badge of sympathy with democratic ideas' - Sandford, op cit., p.34
82. Courier, 16/10/1793.

There was no immunity, even for the elite. Henry Hippersley Coxe, squire of Stoneaston Park, found his bid to secure election to parliament in 1792 dogged by 'unfounded aspersions whispered in the dark' that he was an enemy of the Constitution - probably for no better reason than his family associations with Wilkes in the late 1760s and with Wyvil in the early 1780s. According to Coxe's friend and neighbour Thomas Horner of Mells Park, these smears originated with Webb Jeffries, a clerk at Bridgwater and a man who would himself be accused of belonging to a corresponding society two years later![83]

Since the composition of many RA committees effectively made them a kind of informal club for members of local Corporations and their political allies, their influence was extensive. At Bath it was even alleged that the Corporation had used the RA and the pretext of loyalism to discredit and prevent a public meeting of rate-payers to protest about the state of the city's water supply. Anonymous notices had been sent out 'to forbid any meeting on pain of being branded a Jacobin. This had a better effect than calling out the militia for not a man dared to show his nose'[84].

Identifying the number of people acting as paid agents either of central government or of the Reeves

83. See John Lethbridge's manuscript speech from the hustings, August 1792, and an undated note made by Horner in the Mells Manor Muniments. Also HO 42/32, Anon to Dundas 4/7/1794.
84. Courier, 16/10/1793.

Associations at this time is impossible. In November 1792, the Crown solicitors were preparing a list of attorneys at Trowbridge, Frome, Shepton Mallet, Bath, Bristol, Taunton, Salisbury, Devizes and Chippenham who they would approach, 'it being necessary for us to have agents in the different counties'. These loyal attorneys were requested to assist the government in identifying and prosecuting seditious offenders by employing paid evidence-gatherers (a matter of some irritation to two Bristol solicitors who did not see why they should have to bear the expense)[85]. Henry Hunt claimed he had an altercation with a Bath miller and corn-dealer named Perry in 1794 or 1795 who

> was one of Mr Pitt's agents, paid to promulgate his doctrines, and to put down the arguments of his opponents... It was one of Mr Pitt's plans to employ and pay, out of the secret service money, almost all the travellers in the kingdom (and)... they had from one to three stationary auxiliaries in every principal town in the kingdom, who frequented all places of public resort, and were always ready to denounce any man as a Jacobin and an enemy of his country, who dared to give utterance to an honest, candid thought[86].

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85. See the collection of letters preserved in TS24/2/1-15.
86. Memoirs of Henry Hunt Esq. Written by Himself in His Majesty's Jail at Ilchester in the County of Somerset, Vol 2, (London 1821), pp.43-4.

Magistrates and the laws against sedition

May Knaves who plot the State to vex
Find Law provides for all their necks[87].
(Dr Henry Harington, Mayor of Bath 1793-94)

Penal laws couched in dark times are a loop in which the necks of the most innocent and unsuspecting of mankind may be caught[88].
(Dr Thomas Beddoes, 1795)

The Reeves movement, as an unofficial organ of social control, represented the popularisation of Pittite policies for the defeat of the reform movement. This chapter now considers the role of the judiciary with regard to the anti-sedition laws and their effectiveness as an obstruction to radical organisation. In particular, it evaluates the claims of many reformers that a 'reign of terror' was unleashed against them, and makes special reference to the work of professor Clive Emsley.

The encouragement of informers by Reeves Associations and local authorities was the cause of the widespread denunciations and accusations of seditious behaviour already referred to. Its purpose, in theory at least, was to facilitate prosecutions for seditious language or seditious libel. The success or failure of such moves was

87. Toast attributed by Jerome Murch, Bath Celebrities (Bath 1893), p.149.
88. Courier, 23/11/1795, remark made at a public meeting to oppose the Gagging Acts.

therefore firstly dependent upon the enthusiasm of local magistrates, and the pattern of arrests and prosecution varied unsurprisingly between localities. A link has already been suggested between the paucity of prosecutions at Bristol and the quietist attitude of the city Corporation. As far as we know, there were no prosecutions for sedition at the weaving centre of Trowbridge either, not for want of suitable candidates if Captain Craufurd is to be believed, but perhaps because the town's resident magistrates were 'not the best friends the government has'[89]. By contrast, the rooting out of suspected Jacobins at the nearby city of Bath was conducted with the full participation of the mayor and magistrates and, particularly during the mayoralty of Dr Henry Harington from 1793-94, on a comparatively massive scale.

Four separate sedition cases were initiated at Bath during Harington's year of office, three of which resulted in convictions and prison sentences at the borough Quarter Sessions[90]. There were 'many' other men, he believed, whose 'appearance and conduct afford cause of suspecting their intentions to be rather unfavourable

89. HO 42/35, Garnett to Portland 18/7/1795. Craufurd's reports of 'violent levellers' in the town are supported by an early historian: I well remember how the works of Thomas Paine were sought for and admired by some of our wiseheads; whose minds were like a sponge to suck in all his doctrines': J Bodman, A Concise History of Trowbridge (Bristol 1814), p.vi.
90. For details of these see the table of sedition cases in the Appendix (cases against Wilkinson, Wylde, Bull and Seager).

at this crisis', but against whom 'no specific charges can be brought'[91]. An attempt to prosecute a man named Bourne for distributing copies of 'Rights of Man' in the city had collapsed for want of proof in early December 1792, and the subsequent efforts of the Treasury Solicitors' 'agent' attorney, Mr Vezey, had been no more successful[92]. The first prosecutions for seditious speech at Bath were therefore initiated during the Harington mayoralty. Some suspects, like John Campbell, were undoubtedly not proceeded against because effective informal measures had been taken against them instead. As a correspondent calling for the 'procurement and publication' of the Constitutional Society's membership lists in the Bath Chronicle put it, 'Prevention is more salutary than punishment'[93].

Immediately following his inauguration, Harington announced an intention to clear all 'beggars, ballad singers, prostitutes and disorderly persons' from the city streets[94], obstructed the circulation of the anti-ministerial daily, The Courier (earning him the appellation 'this foe to newspapers and friend to

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91. HO 42/28, Harington to Dundas, 9/2/1794.
92. TS 24/2/7, S Vezey to White, 9/12/1792.
93. Bath Chronicle 7/2/1793.
94. Bath Herald 9/11/1793. Ballad-singers and street musicians were regarded with considerable suspicion for the influence their wares might have upon those who heard them. The Bath Chronicle complained about hawkers' 'wretched publications that have for many years served only to corrupt the minds and manners of the lower class' (3/3/1795); and a street fiddler had caused a minor disturbance in 1792 when he struck up 'Ca Ira': Bath Herald 10/11/1792.

physic')[95], and as chairman of the RA may also have been responsible for the vilification of the rate-payers' meeting called to discuss the quality of the city water supply. As mayor, he was the presiding magistrate at the Quarter Session hearings that gaoled the three alleged Jacobins whose arrests he had ordered. The sacking of the secretary of the Catch Club, the purge of the Theatre Royal, and the dispatching of spies to report on dissenting chapel services[96] all took place during Harington's mayoralty. His enthusiasm appeared boundless - so much so that the Home Office began receiving letters of complaint about the scope of his activities. Harington accused his critics of being 'indisputably deranged' and denied any personal or Corporate abuses of power. Nothing had been done, he maintained, 'but what the law will warrant and the Duty of a magistrate requires'[97]. But his conduct was questioned again in 1796, this time by the Home Secretary who considered his draconian and 'indiscriminate' pursuit of everyone with a French accent rather beyond the spirit of the Aliens Act. The experienced London magistrate and expert on policing, Patrick Colquhoun was sent to Bath to 'advise' Harington of what was required, 'for the opinion here in respect to Bath is somewhat different from what seems to be entertained there...'[98]

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95. Courier, 17/10/1793 & 2/1/1794.
96. Courier, 21/11/1793.
97. HO 42/27, Harington to Dundas 22/11/1793.
98. HO 5/2, Portland to Harington 14/9/1796 & Thomas Carter to Colquhoun 15/9/1796. For Colquhoun see Peter Linebaugh, The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century (London 1991),

Magistrates like Harington then, were perfectly prepared to operate a regime of vicious antagonism towards provincial radicals. But did it amount to a 'terror'? Clive Emsley's work on the sedition trials seeks to use the frequency of prosecution as an index to the severity of Pitt's 'terror'. He argues that the existing laws against sedition, and their repressive strengthening in the Two Acts of 1795, were simply not used often enough to justify the use of this term and that radicals had therefore exaggerated the extent to which they were victimised by the judiciary. Furthermore, most magistrates were loathe to use the laws at their disposal, not only because cases might be difficult to prove, but because radicalism was really too weak a force to warrant the effort. The inference of Emsley's argument is therefore that Reevesite loyalism remained largely unthreatened as a dominant ideology in English popular culture[99], and it is an argument that has not been without influence[100].

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pp.426-30. There had been chaos when every alien in Bath had been ordered by Harington to attend the Guildhall and present their licences for inspection. Only 25 of the 300 who turned up had documents which met with Harington's satisfaction and many others fled the city to avoid 'investigation': Bristol Mercury 12/9/1796.

99. Clive Emsley, 'An Aspect of Pitt's Terror: Prosecutions for Sedition During the 1790s', Social History Vol 6, No.2 (May 1981); Clive Emsley, 'Repression,Terror, and the Rule of Law in England During the Decade of the French Revolution', English Historical Review, (October 1985). His most recent reaffirmation of this view can be found in Clive Emsley, 'The Impact of the French Revolution on British Politics and Society', in Crossley & Small

Marilyn Morris has taken up some of these points and debated Emsley's conclusions about the 'terror'. Her doctoral thesis re-evaluates the informal role of the sedition laws in creating an equation between reform and regicide. Once this link had been made in the public mind, she says, the extra-judicial mechanisms of control and intimidation represented by the RA and its crowd were more easily rallied to the defence of Pitt's ministry. One cannot therefore assess the strength of loyalism simply by counting the number of prosecutions made against radicals[101]. From what we know of the scale of victimisation and intimidation marshalled by the RAs and their allies against confirmed and suspected radicals, this would seem an eminently reasonable point to make, and professor Emsley is largely in concurrence.

One might go further however, and tackle Emsley on his own ground. Even if we accept that the depth of repression can be measured by the action of the law, his

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(eds), The French Revolution and British Culture, (Oxford 1989).

100. See for example, H T Dickinson, British Radicalism and the French Revolution, 1789-1815 (Oxford 1985), p.40 wherein it is stated that under 200 prosecutions 'hardly constitutes a government-inspired reign of terror'; and the same author's 'Popular Conservatism and Militant Loyalism, 1789-1815' in H T Dickinson (ed), Britain and the French Revolution, 1789-1815 (London 1989), p.103, in which Emsley's evidence is used to show that 'traditional liberties were not entirely destroyed and the rule of law still prevailed'.

101. Marilyn A Morris, The Monarchy as an Issue in English Political Argument During the French Revolutionary Era, (Ph.D thesis, London 1988).

conclusions are ill-advised. Emsley has counted 200 prosecutions for sedition during the 1790s in a national sweep of newspaper, assize, quarter session and Home Office records. In fact this figure is almost certainly well short of the mark. In the Bristol, Somerset and Wiltshire region, professor Emsley has either overlooked, or disregarded as irrelevant, a number of men who were charged with a seditious offence but whose cases were dropped when the prosecution offered no evidence at the hearing. If we count such cases into the total, there were not four prosecutions in this region, but twelve convictions and eight acquittals or dropped cases[102].

Some of these show up clearly enough on the assize and county sessions calendars or in the newspapers, but others appear to have been missed because the nature of the offence was not entered into the legal record. James Tally, for example, was imprisoned for two months at the Somerset Midsummer Sessions in 1796 for inciting soldiers to desert and for seditious speech at Shepton Mallet, but the offence for which he was convicted is recorded as an unspecified misdemeanour[103]. In such cases, details of the offence can sometimes be confirmed by matching session rolls to newspapers or correspondence files, or with Justice's Minute Books, but this method is not

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102. Details of these cases, together with references will be found in the table in the Appendix.
103. Quarter Session Rolls, Q/SR 364/3, July 1796; and Quarter Session Minute Book 1791-1797, Q/SO 16, Somerset County Record Office. Affidavits filed with the session rolls confirm the details of the offence.

infallible. The Bath Quarter Session Rolls list a total of 61 unexplained prosecutions for breach of the peace between 1792 and 1800[104].

Some men were brought before borough sessions, rather than county quarter sessions or the assize. Clive Emsley has noted some of these (Bath for instance - although even here there are important omissions), but not investigated others. This is why, for instance, he has missed the case of Thomas Batchelor who was prosecuted for seditious words at the borough sessions in Salisbury in 1796[105].

Further cases may have been dealt with summarily by magistrates sitting in petty sessions; perhaps under 19 Geo.II c.21 (for profane swearing)[106]. Oaths made in the hearing of a single witness or two justices were punishable by fines - usually of one or two shillings - and magistrates certainly used the Act at times to secure convictions against men whom they suspected of a more serious offence, but where evidence was poor. Even where

104. Bath Quarter Session Rolls, Bath Guildhall Record Office.
105. WRO A3/110, Salisbury City QS Great Rolls, 1796.
106. I have discovered no evidence of cases where this law was used for the punishment of sedition, but it was certainly employed by magistrates in a catch-all sense; for example in the punishment of ten men who took part in a crowd 'riding a mock-mayor' at Walcot revels in 1823. Other charges included obstructing footpaths and pecking and tossing, but it looks likely that the challenge to the mayor's authority was the real reason behind the charges. Only one man was specifically charged with this offence, Thomas Bence, for inciting a riot: Bath & Cheltenham Gazette, 29/7/1823.

records survive however, details of the precise words and phrases used by the accused generally do not[107]. Records of such procedures are notoriously scarce, but could quite plausibly have been used to punish the use of 'seditious' speech or 'damning the King'. In February 1793, Edward Barrington of Stoke St Gregory near Taunton was examined by a magistrate in petty sessions following a fight between him and another man. The cause of the disturbance was an alleged seditious outburst from Barrington in which he damned the King and wished for a revolution, but although sworn affidavits to this effect were taken, they were not used. Instead, the magistrate convicted Barrington on the spot for drunkenness and committed both men to the next assize for assault - a charge subsequently dropped. In effect, Barrington had been dealt with by the law for a seditious offence, without the sedition laws being invoked, and without any recourse to a jury[108]. The lesson here is that eighteenth century legal records are simply too incomplete and undetailed for an arbitrary figure like Emsley's 200 to be drawn from them.

I would also question the assumption that only actual prosecutions can form a useful index to legal repression, or the exercising of a judicial 'terror'. Emsley's

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107. See examples of this practice recorded in Elizabeth Crittal (ed), The Justicing Notebook of William Hunt 1744-1749 (Wiltshire Record Society, Devizes 1982), pp.16 & 460.
108. TS11/1007/4053, Southey and Beadon to Chamberlaine and White, 23/12/1792.

figures take no account of those men who were arrested, examined and often committed to gaol for seditious offences, but subsequently released for want of prosecution in advance of a court hearing. Whilst many of these cases have quite possibly simply vanished from record, others have not. Into this category for instance, falls a man named Pizzio who was bundled into a Wiltshire lock-up in 1794 by a constable who heard him 'in a very hasty passion wish the French were immediately to enter the Town and cut off all our heads'. It does not appear that he was prosecuted, and we know of the case only because Lord Ailesbury's agent reported it in a private letter. No newspaper or 'official' legal corroboration exists[109]. Adding instances of known arrest to the total number of people against whom the sedition laws were used to their full conclusion, would still further increase Emsley's total. The following table shows how dramatically the picture may be altered in the South West if we use this criteria:

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109. Savernake Estate Papers, WRO 1300/4630, Thomas Potter to Mr Wilson 25/6/1794, Wiltshire County Record Office.

	Prosecutions noted by Emsley	Prosecutions not noted by Emsley	Known arrests possibly not prosecuted	Total
Bristol	-	1	8	9.
Bath	2	5	3	10.
Rest of Somerset	2	7	3	12.
Wiltshire	-	3	2	5.

Remembering that these figures represent only those cases known to have been started, the total number of people dealt with in a single region (36) is still a considerable advance on Clive Emsley's figure of four. It would seem reasonable to expect closer research in other parts of Britain to reveal similar discrepancies[110].

If they do, and we propose for the sake of argument that professor Emsley's two hundred prosecutions nationally are increased by the same proportion as in this region (to over one and a half thousand), they may still, of course, be judged insufficient evidence of 'terror'. But is the precise number of prosecutions particularly relevant? Was it ever government's intention to provide for the actual prosecution of a maximum number of

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110. Alan Booth has found a total of 155 arrests for political offences in the North West of England between 1792 and 1803. Most, although not all, of these were for sedition: Alan Booth, Reform, Repression and Revolution: Radicalism and Loyalism in the North West of England, 1789-1803, (Ph.D thesis, Lancaster 1979), Appendix 2.

'seditious' persons, or to encourage exemplary sentencing against selected targets?

Clive Emsley demonstrates well the cautious approach of many magistrates to the use of the sedition laws and the doubts both they and the Home Office appeared to harbour over establishing sufficient proof of intent, and verification of the actual words used[111]. But some cases suggest this was not always the criteria adopted. In 1798, Crown Officers advised two Keynsham magistrates to proceed with the prosecution of Peter Sequest despite tenuous evidence. Witnesses testimony that he had said 'God bless the French and I wish them success' failed to convince the jury that he was not a loyal man at heart, and they pronounced him guilty in fact but not by intention. This verdict was rejected by the bench so the jury reconsidered and found him simply guilty. Sentencing him to a month in gaol, the judge accepted that Sequest had not been 'in the free exercise of his intellectual faculties at the time the words were spoken'[112].

The case against Bennett and Robins at Bath a year earlier had, by contrast, been abandoned following advice from the Crown Officers. As we have already seen, the 'seditious' intention of these men (and particularly Bennett) had been clearly established, and yet the Home

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111. Clive Emsley, 'An Aspect of Pitt's Terror', pp.160-64
112. Bath Chronicle 17/5/1798; HO 43/10, Portland to Ireland 14/5/1798 & 4/6/1798.

Office advised against prosecution on the grounds that the precise words of the offence had not been recorded[113]. In fact, the words had been passed on to the Home Office in a precise enough form to make refutation unlikely, but there may have been doubts that calling the King a 'rogue' amounted to sedition. However, since Bennett also had 'seditious' leaflets in his pocket when arrested, including one with a diagram of a pike on the reverse, and these were also forwarded for the Crown Officers' consideration, failure to recommend prosecution is puzzling.

One explanation for the behaviour of the Crown in both of these cases may lie not in the relativity of seditious intention, nor yet in ease of prosecution, but in the capacity to create utilitarian propaganda. The salient factor in Peter Sequest's prosecution may have been that he had recently been appointed a Tythingman, and that he made his remarks whilst going from door to door compiling an inventory of property for possible requisitioning in the event of invasion[114]. His indiscretion may not have been particularly dangerous, but in such a context it was quite unforgivable. His trial and likely public contrition would provide a useful reaffirmation of the loyalty of the parish, and the prosecution of a Tythingman would admirably demonstrate the principles of equality under law. As local magistrates put it,

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113. HO 43/9, John King to Jefferies 16/8/1797.
114. Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 19/5/1798.

> It is hoped the defendant will be punished for his offence as an example to others as it might in great measure tend to prevent the seed of sedition from spreading through the country more than it has. This is much to be wished for[115].

Even the relative innocuousness of his offence provided a useful opportunity for the re-emphasising of linkage between a few indiscreet remarks and the safety of the Constitution. The prosecuting counsel at another seemingly unimportant trial at Bath in 1794 had carefully explained that

> the prisoner may be deemed too insignificant an object to create such disorder, but the minutest seed of rebellion should never be suffered... (else) its poison might contaminate everything around it[116].

Bennett's avoidance of prosecution makes more sense once it is accepted that the purpose of sedition trials was not to confront organised jacobinism in a direct manner. Government had no wish to provide a platform from which committed radicals might lament their unjust persecution, nor to invite complicated legal conflict over the wording of indictments and interpretation of the law. Bennett had, it will be remembered, already won release from custody at Bristol because of the intervention of the Constitutional Society's barrister. A far more useful

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115. TS 11/1079 5390, indictment papers for the King vs Peter Sequest, together with related correspondence.
116. Bath Herald 3/5/1794

purpose had been served by the unproblematic prosecution of farmer Thomas Brimble in 1793 who, on being released from the pillory, threw off his hat and yelled 'God save the King!' - a comment much to the taste of the provincial press who joyfully reported his contrition[117]. The fact that neither Bennett, King nor Campbell, three of the most active and committed local radicals of the period were ever prosecuted for sedition, although all were subjected to informal repression, would seem to suggest that the victims of the sedition laws were carefully selected but not always for their commitment to radicalism.

Of course, genuine radicals were not immune from prosecution. The conviction of Benjamin Bull for the publication and distribution of Rights of Man is proof enough of this. But, as the case notes make clear, Bull's case was brought partly as an assault against the self-assertive politicking of the city's journeyman tailors, and not for the stated offence in isolation[118]. The authorities pushed home their political advantage after Bull had been in gaol for ten months and it became apparent that his wife and children faced starvation during the 1795 subsistence crisis. The resulting public subscription for their relief was a masterpiece of loyalist propaganda, for it was made conditional upon

117. Bath Chronicle 18/4/1793.
118. This is suggested by the preamble of the indictment which complains that the tailors ere 'constantly talking politics': George Papers, Bath Guildhall Record Office.

Bull's 'solemn renunciation' and 'true penitence' and a recommendation to his 'late associates' that they mend their ways 'before (like him) they lose their liberty'. The published list of subscribers to the family of this prodigal son includes Hannah More's Bath printer Samuel Hazard, Bull's prosecutor John Anstey, and Lady Harington - wife of Dr Henry[119].

Given a compliant presiding magistrate, juries were impressionable enough and convictions simple enough to secure, provided the accused made a poor job of his defence. George Wilkinson's prosecutor had lectured the jury on their

> Duty as loyal and good subjects... to stop the tongue of seditious slanderers against the King and government of this country; to put a bridle to their mouths, that of reason[120].

Acquittal would thus bring their own loyalism publicly into question, for these trials were often well reported in the press and attended by large crowds. The jury who found Thomas Wylde guilty of seditious speech at Bath were treated to a 'lame' performance from defending counsel who 'behaved trifling and not like a lawyer in his questions to the witnesses or in his harangue to the jury', and would have found it hard to ignore the interruptions of the men of 'rank and distinction' from

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119. Bath Herald 15/8/1795.
120. Prosecutor's notes for the trial of George Wilkinson in the George Papers, Bath Guildhall Record Office.

the public benches. When the verdict was announced, the public gave vent to their 'vast joy' by

> shouting, huzzaing and throwing up and clapping hands - as well as hats. The court was obliged to give orders in conveying the convict to prison to protect him from the populace.

Yet the Town Clerk did not consider the defendant unfairly disadvantaged or the trial prejudiced. On the contrary, the hearing had been 'so fair and upright that it reflects honour to the court before whom the trial was had'[121]. Wilkinson's counsel rested his client's 'defence' on the undesireability of pursuing a trial which would publicise 'foolish' political opinions that were better 'treated with silence and contempt'. The jury, having been addressed by mayor Harington, did not agree and spent only two minutes deliberating their verdict[122]. By and large, if a local regime like Henry Harington's wanted a conviction, it got one.

It was never government's intention to pursue prosecution at every opportunity. The alleged implementation of a 'reign of terror' rests not with the total number of prosecutions but with the use of repression (and the

121. TS 11/1071/5056, Jefferies to White, 29/4/1794. The impartiality of the courts was brought further into question by the acquittal of Latham, a member of the crowd which laid seige to the Bristol Constitutional Society's rooms in 1797, on a charge of assault. Again, a large crowd packed the public benches and hooted at 'citizen' King for bringing the case, then cheered as the case was dismissed after a ten minute deliberation by the jury. See report in Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 19/8/1797.
122. Courier, 16/1/1794.

threat of it) as a whole, both judicial and informal (and, as far as the law is concerned, with the number of people interfered with by the magistracy, whether prosecuted or not). The truth of the charge may vary from region to region, for the implementation of 'terror' (by which I mean the creation of a climate in which political dissent was muzzled, and the spirit of Constitutional rights to freedom of expression over-ridden by widespread and officially endorsed threats, beatings and gaolings) was certainly a locally administered affair. It is perfectly legitimate for historians to continue arguing over interpretations of 'terror' (and the inevitability of comparisons with the well-publicised atrocities perpetrated in France make that assessment very difficult to make)[123], but they should at least stop extrapolating evidence for the liberality of the English ruling class or the failure of radical argument, from the 'infrequent' use of the law.

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The voluntary 'ascendancy' of Reevesism cannot be taken at face-value if its popularity was largely manufactured by coercive measures. Although most historians have agreed that the movement's persuasive powers were

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123. Whilst numbers of prosecutions do not compare with those under the French Terror, other features of the Terror do - particularly the drift towards systems of denunciation, spying and informing.

considerable, the authenticity and real strength of the mass loyalism thus facilitated is rarely questioned, nor the implications such a question might have upon the accuracy of assessments of support for radicalism and its conjectured survival into the post-war years. Historians must be wary of giving too much credence to the claims of dominant voices, like those 'gentlemen who endeavoured to cramp opinion and padlock speech' by preventing the free circulation of the Courier in Bristol and Bath[124]. A correspondent of that paper had asserted in 1793 that the appearance of Bath as 'a place of aristocratic influence' was deceptive and no more than the product of a Reevesite stranglehold upon the means of expression. Most people, he argued, were on the contrary

> liberal and enlightened... No opinion should be formed from the conduct of a few persons who come here to end, in indolence, a life misspent in vice, folly and corruption[125].

In other words, dominant voices like Edward Harington's, who so noisily and publicly celebrated the death of jacobinism at Bath in 1794, have no greater claim upon the ears of the twentieth century than those of the unknown and almost unnoticed discontents who paid a nocturnal visit to Harington's house a few days later and 'daubed it with filth and mire'[126].

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124. See attempts to ban the paper from public coffee houses in Courier 17/10/1793 (Bath), and 1/6/1797 (Bristol).
125. Courier, 1/7/1793.
126. Bath Journal, 27/9/1794.

Yet there was a further side to loyalist supremacy; and it is one which complicates still more the assessment of its true nature and support. This was the extent to which popular conceptions of loyalism actually conflicted with radical demands for reform and the fact that virtually everybody in England considered themselves loyal to the constitution. The question which must next be asked therefore is how polarised was the debate between reform and Reevesism in reality compared with its presentation in the propaganda of the latter? Did most people really occupy the entrenched positions which were apparently ascribed to them, or were there circumstances in which supposed radicals could and did express unanimity with the stated demands of Reevesism? These questions are tackled in the next chapter.

Chapter Four

Languages of Inclusivity: Constitutionalism, Slavery and the Crime of Innovation

> The great cause of humanity which is now pleading in the face of the universe, has but two enemies; those friends of antiquity, and those friends of innovation, who, impatient of suspense, are inclined violently to interrupt the calm, the incessant, the rapid and auspicious progress which thought and reflection appear to be making in the world. (William Godwin[1]).

It is a contention of this thesis that the vaunted hegemony of loyalism in the 1790s has been unwittingly construed by historians as a hegemony of Pittite anti-reformism. Certainly this was an illusion aimed for by

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1. William Godwin, Enquiry Concerning Political Justice (London 1793 - Pelican paperback edition 1976), p.261.

the architects of Reevesism, but its rhetoric has been taken too much at face value. In one of the most recent contributions to the debate over national identity for instance, J R Dinwiddy accepts the sudden reappearance of radical patriotism as a cogent force in the depressed years following the conclusion of the Napoleonic wars in 1815. Yet he does not doubt the authenticity of Reevesite 'hegemony' over radicalism between 1790 and 1805[2]. It is surely questionable whether the fleeting imposition of Reevesite ideology and the closing down of popular opposition over a relatively short period justifies the use of such an unequivocally cohesive term as 'hegemony'. This chapter considers the phenomenon of loyalism from a factionally neutral standpoint, examines the unpredictable political attitudes of 'the people', and suggests that if Reevesism was not necessarily the consequence of loyalism, then a re-appraisal of the nature of the 'loyalist' victory over radicalism may be long overdue.

Royalty, Radicals and the Constitution.

Patriotic pride in those liberties won through the Act of Settlement in 1689 and symbolically guaranteed by a tripartite Constitution was widespread and never the exclusive property of the RA movement. The attachment of the Bristol Constitutional Society to these principles

2. J R Dinwiddy, 'England', in O Dann and J R Dinwiddy (eds), Nationalism in the Age of the French Revolution (London 1988), p.69.

for example, will be discussed below and it was the achievement of Reevesism to make reform and patriotism appear incompatible. Yet although Reevesism claimed to enjoy the unwavering allegiance of a very large number of citizens, popular attachment to the RA model of loyalism was not straightforward. The Bath chairmen were a case in point. Their much publicised 'Loyal Address' to the RA, as well as the frequency with which they volunteered to act as special constables, may (as I suggested in the previous chapter) have been substantially motivated by economic self-interest. Rather less well-publicised was the action of the same men less than a year after the drafting of the address, in striking against new conditions of service, picketing the Guildhall, destroying the sedans of strike-breakers and 'insulting' the staunchly loyalist mayor, Henry Harington. Such disorder conflicted gravely with the sentiments professed in their 'Address', but not with their economic self-interest as tradesmen. Even less celebrated however, was the 'malicious' reception they gave the Duchess of York when she visited the city in 1795 and declined to ride with them[3]. Even their loyalty to the Royal Family appears to have been subservient to pride in their trade.

Popular attitudes to the Crown were complex, despite the simplistic rhetoric of the RAs which sought to reduce everything to a 'for' or 'against' dialectic. The anonymous Wiltshire patriot who called for a republic in

3. The Courier, 29/11/1793 & 30/12/1795.

1800 appeared most offended not by the King's institutional status but by the fact that he came from Germany: 'Let us true Britons look to ourselves', he urged. 'Let us banish some to Hanover where they came from'[4]. During the weeks of local debate that followed the Royal Proclamation against sedition in May 1792, some radicals still displayed hopes of appropriating the King as a supporter of reform. A correspondent in the Bath Chronicle for instance, prefaced a verbal assault upon the enemies of reform, dissent and press freedom with a loyal address to the throne, warmly thanking the King for the defence of constitutional liberty[5]. Yet support for the monarchy as an institution did not necessarily infer immediate affection for the Royal Family as human beings, as the attack on the King's coach by a hungry London crowd in 1795 so clearly demonstrated.

Superficial 'republican' sentiments such as these were not unusual at times of scarcity when the King's position as a member of the best-fed classes or as a potential corrupting influence upon Pitt's ministry were most keenly perceived. A week after the attack on the royal coach, and a few months after a crowd of women had blockaded grain shipments at Bath to the tune of 'God Save the King', the Duke of York, commander of the British forces then tackling republicanism in Europe, received anonymous threats at the same city and cancelled

4. Anonymous note found at Ramsbury, HO 42/50, Meyrick to Portland 12/6/1800.
5. Bath Chronicle, 21/6/1792.

all public appearances there. The Bath Chronicle considered this a mistake, not because it doubted the authenticity of the threats, but because public appearances were

> the best means of opposing the principles of the factious and the firmest security we can trust to against the designs of the turbulent[6].

The equestrian statue of William III in the centre of Queen Square at Bristol was a place of symbolic resonance to all local patriots, regardless of politics. It was not simply a graven image of monarchy however, but of liberty and the values of the Glorious Revolution. Popular support for the ideal of limited monarchical influence should not be confused with an unquestioning adherence to monarchy as a timeless (and historically absolutist) constitutional tradition. Nor should it be confused with obeisant deification, for popular attitudes to the Crown - and even to the memory of William III - often tended towards the ribald. The club established at Bath in 1782 for the purpose of annually commemorating the Torbay landing with a feast each November 4th, may have been a for-runner of the radical-constitutional Revolution Society, but its tone was hardly reverential. A rule debarred membership to anyone 'whose nose does not measure three inches by one and a half inches'[7]. Yet such

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6. For the Bath women see the London Evening Post, 4/8/1795. For the Duke of York's visit see Bath Chronicle, 12/11/1795 & 3/12/1795 and Bath Journal, 16/11/1795.
7. Bath Chronicle 7/3/1782.

earthy mockery did not detract from the high esteem in which the principles of William's reign were held. In 1795, Thomas Beddoes urged radical campaigners against the Gagging Acts of George III's ministers to 'assemble if you can find no other place, in Queen Square', and to clothe William's body in black mourning 'til our liberties be secure'[8].

In 1800, ten days after the anniversary of the passing of the Act of Settlement, a bloody loaf was fixed to the statue railings and a note attached to it:

> My dear, dear friends... your country bleeding at every pore, your Familys starving, your husbands and sons sent to Foreign countrys to be murdered, and for what, why to keep pitt and his gang in place what care they... will you spend your last shilling and last drop of blood, for gods sake withhold it[9].

There is a 'Little Englander' anti-ministerial patriotism at work here, but the poignancy of its delivery at William III's statue does not imply support for the leadership of the present King[10]. In 1813, a hostile crowd that included a presumably 'loyal' ex-constable pulled down the Jubilee statue of George III in Bristol's

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8. Thomas Beddoes, A Word In Defence of the Bill of Rights Against Gagging Bills (Bristol 1795).
9. One of three anonymous notes left during the night of February 23rd. Another was pinned to the Mansion House: Bristol Corporation Letter Book, Morgan to Portland 26/2/1800.
10. For early Little Englandism see Richard Gott, 'Little Englanders', in R Samuel (ed), Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of the British National Identity, 1. History and Politics (London 1989).

Portland Square, damaging it beyond means of repair. The base had contained a dedication to 'the blessings enjoyed under the best of Kings'. The outlying situation of Portland Square (a new development at the north eastern extremity of the city) did not make it an obvious target for a popular demonstration of abstract anti-monarchical feeling. The centrally prominent position of William's statue made it a far more impressive objective; yet it remained undamaged not only in 1813, but even by the crowds who swarmed around it during the Bristol riots of 1831[11].

The late eighteenth century 'apotheosis' of the monarchy, documented so assiduously by Linda Colley, was not necessarily the apotheosis of George III[12]. The apparent and unprecedented fondness with which the people of England regarded George was not rooted in positive personal attributes. Indeed, the virulent bouts of porphyria with which he was periodically afflicted placed

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11. Bristol Mercury 29/3/1813 & 10/5/1813; J Latimner, Annals of Bristol in the Nineteenth Century (Bristol 1887), p.35. The Jubilee statue was erected in 1811 with much popular pageantry and bonfire-making. The ex-constable served a twelve month gaol term for his part in the attack on George's monument. Far from being damaged, William's statue was adorned with a tri-colour of liberty by the rioting crowds who burned down the Mansion House in 1831. See Mark Harrison, Crowds and History: Mass Phenomena in English Towns, 1790-1835 (Cambridge 1988), p.297.
12. For a detailed examination of the efforts made to promote George as the father of the nation, see Linda Colley, 'The Apotheosis of George III: Loyalty, Royalty and the British Nation, 1760-1820', Past and Present, 102 (February 1984). This account takes the apparent success of the venture very much at face value.

unavoidable limits upon his constitutional role in government. In the years following the French revolution, his reputation as a strong and caring 'father' to the nation was largely engineered by a perceived need to believe in the domestic health of the constitution and the monarch's place as its impartial guardian. The symbolic embodiment of the nation as a united family gave a literal meaning to the phrase 'domestic peace'. There is little evidence to suggest that George himself was particularly popular; far from it, for few monarchs can have endured quite so many attempts on their lives by their own subjects. Undoubtedly however, George's recovery from his first serious illness in 1789 was received with a genuine enough sense of relief on all sides. The respectability and stability of the monarchy may have been placed in serious doubt if the deeply unpopular Prince of Wales had succeeded his father at such a critical time. The stability and health of George III seemed inextricably intertwined with the health and stability of the constitution.

Royalist fervour during the winter of 1792-3 when the Reeves movement was founded, owed much of its momentum to the misfortunes of the hapless Capets across the channel, and the RAs were not slow to seize its potential. Regicide, presented as a consequence of upsetting constitutional practice, made the equation of radicalism with a kind of cut-throat republicanism frighteningly compelling. The Somerset landowner, Richard Paget

described the universal sense of unease brought about by the death of Louis:

> At present the murdered monarch and the approach of war seem to have surpassed every other consideration. All persons who could muster a new black coat or furbish an old one have put themselves into mourning for poor Louis. Last week we were black and all black; since yesterday we are less funereal.

In May, concern was switched from the murdered Louis to his endangered family:

> We are all quaking for the poor Queen of France and little Louis 17th...Loyalty is still in full blaze here - God Save the King played by every hurdy gurdy[13].

George III and ministerial loyalism were direct beneficiaries of English sympathy for the misfortunes of Louis XVI. Of course, loyalism of this kind did not imply any necessary or actual hostility to radicalism amongst the mass of the people provided it remained constitutional. It could still be claimed with some justification that revolution in France, and all the horrors it brought in its wake, were a consequence of the <u>denial</u> of reform in that country.

As Hugh Cunningham rightly points out, the French Revolutionary era witnessed much ideological conflict

13. <u>Paget Papers</u>, R to J Paget 4/2/1793, file 137, and Mrs Coxe to J Paget 4/5/1793, file 170, Bristol University special collections library.

over the appropriation of British patriotism[14], and the charge of disaffection became a potent weapon in the hands of Reevesite loyalists. Both sides in the debate were compelled to shift their definition of the term however as events unfolded and domestic and international circumstances changed. In the immediate aftermath of the Priestley 'Church & King' riots at Birmingham in 1791 for instance, a West Country supporter of the English Establishment appealed to loyalists and radicals alike to reject the violent rhetoric of 'sham patriots' and posed the rhetorical question:

> Of despotism, can Englishmen complain?
> Beneath a government that hangs not P__ne?
> ...Here all enjoy their own and live at ease
> And write - and talk - and do - whate'er they please[15].

But by the following year, although the government had not actually hanged Thomas Paine, it had forced him into exile and tried him in absentia for seditious libel. Nor indeed was it only such major opposition figures as Paine who had their cherished liberty to write, talk and do whate'er they pleased roughly terminated by the restraining hand of government. Few loyalists now felt able to continue the patriotic argument that untrammelled free-speech was one of the unassailable virtues of the English Constitution. Similarly, the reformers of 1791 were able to defend the Birmingham Revolution Society's

14. Hugh Cunningham, 'The Language of Patriotism, 1750-1914', History Workshop Journal, 12 (Autumn 1981).
15. Bath Journal 8/8/1791.

decision to celebrate the anniversary of the French Revolution because it was an event in which 'twenty-six million people have exchanged oppression and misery for freedom and happiness':

> Besides, the French have made no attempts to subvert the Church and have confirmed the monarchy by an almost unanimous vote; they have only proved themselves enemies to excessive power in the one and excessive wealth in the other. How can their English admirers be charged with disseminating republican principles or showing an aversion to religious establishments?[16]

It may have been reasonable to claim that it was patriotic to applaud the advent of political liberty in other previously autocratic regimes on these grounds. But the radical argument was not helped by the subsequent arrival in Britain, and particularly at Bath where there was enormous public sympathy for their misfortunes, of droves of 'penniless' French churchmen, deprived of their livings by the Revolution and forced into exile. Nor was it helped, of course, (whatever the English precedent) by the execution of the French King in 1793. The boundaries and interpretation of proper patriotic behaviour would consequently have to be re-drawn more than once by both the 'radicals' and the 'loyalists' during the 1790s.

Radicals continued to regard themselves as great 'patriots' well into the following century and there

16. Bath Chronicle 4/8/1791.

seems no reason to believe their use of the term was disingenuous[17]. In 1839, Thomas Jolliffe, squire of Ammerdown contemptuously acknowledged radicalism's persistent claim to the word when he enrolled 500 special constables 'in consequence of the intrusion of the Chartists and other foaming patriots into this neighbourhood'[18]. The attempted appropriation of the vocabulary of patriotism by Reevesite loyalists did not imply an enduring defeat for its more radical usage, if indeed a defeat ever really took place. Certainly, the language became ambiguous when applied to constitutional problem-solving, but the ease with which either side could conjure up its spirit was the effect of an apparently genuine national consensus about abstract national values; freedom, liberty, and due process of law - the rights of (English) man[19]. Linda Colley's belief, that anti-radical loyalism depended upon the popularity

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17. See Epstein, 'The Constitutional Idiom', op cit. See also Hugh Cunningham, op cit., for the continuing ambiguity of the term during the 1790s.
18. Hylton Papers, DD HY Box 22, S T Jolliffe to Edmund Broderip 30/3/1839, Somerset County Record Office.
19. The survival of English radical patriotism into the present age is demonstrated by the socialism of George Orwell, and eloquently expressed in his The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius (Penguin paperback edition, London 1982). Possession of the term continues to fluctuate. America's anti-Vietnam war protestors who burnt their country's flag in the 1960s have been superseded by a self-consciously patriotic anti-war movement in the present day. Demonstrations against the Gulf War were led by ex-GIs proudly carrying the stars and stripes. Later that same year, the leader of the British Labour Party devoted part of his speech to annual conference to an effort 'to redefine patriotism in terms of a government's duty to safeguard the economy'. See reports in The Guardian, 16/2/1991 and 2/10/1991.

of the monarchy for its nourishment and that it therefore enjoyed large-scale success only during the reigns of George III and Victoria[20], overlooks the cross-political universality of concern for the 'health' of the monarchy. Estimations of the strength of Reevesite loyalism, based on degrees of support for the Crown, are therefore liable to misinterpretation.

Radical concerns with the constitutional legitimacy of struggle are important. The endurance in radical circles of the Norman Yoke and Anglo-Saxon liberties version of English history in the face of Paineite 'natural rights' iconoclasm has been noted before[21]. What must be emphasised is that the notion of legitimation ran contrary to the accusation of 'innovation' levelled at English reformers by the architects of Reevesism. The primacy of these concerns is perfectly illustrated by the culmination in 1812 of the Bath freemen's long campaign for the borough franchise. Presenting their case as one of rights already held under English law but denied them

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20. Linda Colley, 'Apotheosis', op cit., pp.122-5. Colley notes and agrees with the claims of early nineteenth century radicals that mass public attendance at royal ceremonial events was largely manipulated by the state and no proof of national support for the monarchy. This may be true, but it is not the point. The rejection of republicanism can be allowed, but on its own it tells us very little about popular political attitudes.
21. J Epstein, 'The Constitutional Idiom', op cit.,; John Stevenson, 'Paineites to a Man?: The English Popular Radical Societies in the 1790s', Bulletin of The Society for the Study of Labour History, Vol 54 No.3 (Winter 1989).

by a corrupt local oligarchy[22], the freemen backed the nomination of John Allen for the parliamentary seat in 1812, and attacked the Guildhall after magistrates ordered his arrest. Their sense of outrage at Allen's treatment was informed and strengthened by the conviction that constitutional law and not just collective folk memory was on their side.

The Bristol Constitutional Society's own manifesto of 1794 committed them to the 'renovation' of 'that Constitution which is our boast, our glory, our birthright'. It expressed a firm belief in the system of 'Monarchy, Aristocracy, Democracy blended' and trusted in universal suffrage to fulfil the promises made in the Act of Settlement:

> By this, corruption and bribery would receive their death's wound, and the Constitution, with all its blessings, would be effectively established.

As things stood, 'The language of our laws is EQUALITY, while the operation is OPPRESSION'[23]. The intervention of the Gagging Acts in 1795 may have convinced the Society that the 'oppression' they had felt in 1794 was worsening, but it did not alter their view of the constitution. In 1797, their secretary still 'declared himself a friend to the Constitution of 1688, which he

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22. See their copiously detailed case in A View of Bath, Historical, Political and Chronological, (Bath 1813) and An Impartial Statement of Facts Arising out of Proceedings of the Mock Election at Bath (Bath 1812).
23. Address of the Bristol Society for a Parliamentary Reform to the People of Great Britain (Bristol 1794)

wished to see restored to its original purity'[24]. This vocabulary of radical constitutionalism had, by the early nineteenth century, gripped the Bridgwater 'jacobin' Thomas Poole so firmly that he helped found a Somerset Constitutional Club in 1822 which placed 'parliamentary reform' last on its published programme, beneath 'Loyalty to the King', 'Attachment to the Constitution', and 'Veneration for the religion and laws of the country'. Innovation was explicitly excluded from the agenda. As another member explained,

> by reform he meant not the new-fangled notions and mad schemes of visionaries and enthusiasts, but such measures as would restore to them, pre and in full vigour, the enjoyment of Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights[25].

In the language of radicalism, the constitution of the body-politic precisely mirrors the constitution of the body of flesh. Just as, earlier in the century, the 'causes of the present discontents' had often prompted quasi-clinical investigations into the health of the constitution, with its afflicting 'disorders' and corrupting maladies[26], so now radical panegyrists imagined the nation upon its death bed. The delicate balance of the most perfect constitution could still be

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24. A Statement of Facts Relative to the Riot in Union Street... (Bristol 1797)
25. Bath and Cheltenham Gazette, 9/4/1822.
26. For a full analysis of constitutional health warnings in the 1760s, see John Brewer, Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III (Cambridge 1976), pp.240-263.

upset by disease and its symptoms of disorder. The moralising homilies of the Religious Tract Society described criminality in these terms; the executed wretch at the centre of The Dying Criminal was 'in the possession of an unimpaired constitution' yet still corrupted by 'vice and ruin'[27]. The Society was not a reforming body of course but staunchly loyalist and another example of the 'two-way traffic' of constitutional language. For radicals, the appropriate medicine for restoring balance to the constitution was a measured injection of 'the People', but not the unproven quack potions offered by the 'visionaries and enthusiasts' cited above. In the circumstances, the presence of prominent medical innovators like Fox (mental health) and Beddoes (pneumatics) in the vanguard of moderate intellectual radicalism is hardly surprising. Beddoes, it will be remembered, was the man who wanted the ailing body of William III's statue draped in black crepe in 1795. For this 'diagnostician of social pathology in the body politic' as Roy Porter describes him, ill-health was directly related to commerce, material wealth and conspicuous consumption on the one hand, and the hunger and poverty caused by Pitt's war with France on the other. Political and bodily corruption were therefore both related by Beddoes to the development of social and economic dislocation; the crucible of 'class' antagonism. The rich corrupted themselves without

27. Quoted in D Lovegrove, Established Church, Sectarian People: Itinerancy and the transformation of English Dissent, 1780-1830 (Cambridge 1988), p.111.

realising it, effectively praising 'the advantages of a feeble constitution', whilst visiting penury, scarcity and unemployment upon the poor[28].

Positions and attitudes adopted by sections of the newspaper press do not fit snugly into convenient positions upon a radical/loyalist axis either. In March 1792, the proprietors of the Sherborne Mercury were agents for a 'History of Rotten Boroughs' which promised to expose

> the many arbitrary violations which have been practiced to deprive us of our rights and privileges since William the Conqueror to the present time (and promote) without any violence, a speedy and effective parliamentary reform[29].

But the paper had little difficulty that winter in confirming its support for the Reeves movement, and demonstrating it with the largest selection of insertions and reports from local Associations in any of the

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28. My thanks to Roy Porter for letting me see his unpublished paper, 'Thomas Beddoes and the Bristol Enlightenment', given at the Eighth International Congress on the Enlightemnent at Bristol in July 1991. The quotations are on pp.20 & 25. Porter suggests a paradox in Beddoes' insistence upon leaving medicine in the hands of a progressive elite whilst he remained 'a champion of the people, a political radical, a democrat even' (p.31). But Beddoes' radicalism was, as stated in chapter two, moderating considerably by 1797 and he was rarely a convincing universal suffragist. Beddoes was as wary of the swinish multitude as Burke (see below, section on abolitionism) and as fearful of reckless innovators as his fellow reformer, William Godwin.
29. Sherborne Mercury 5/3/1792

Somerset county papers. The success of the RAs, it said, was

> convincing proof that Englishmen are satisfied with that excellent constitution and convinced that any alteration in it, attempted by violent means (my emphasis), must be attended with irreparable injury to the happiness of the kingdom and introduce evils of which the example of a neighbouring nation affords an awful and affecting lesson[30].

Did this amount to an editorial about-face? Such an interpretation would rest upon an invented Radicalism which pre-supposed 'reform' to mean altering the Constitution by force of arms. But the division between radicals and loyalists was not so clear-cut, and few would seriously have considered it to be so. The Mercury's declaration made all the right noises without clarifying its attitude one way or the other. Such declarations of loyalism, like that of the man attending a loyalist meeting at Taunton fifteen years later who 'would yield to no-one in loyalty to the throne or in affection for the Constitution' but nevertheless believed the county's distress to be caused by 'the war and the Borough Faction', carry very mixed messages about real political attitudes[31].

The conventionally patriotic vocabulary of the Bristol Constitutional Society was never categorically rejected

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30. Sherborne Mercury 4/2/1793
31. Bath & Cheltenham Gazette 26/2/1817.

by the insurrectionary United movement. The UB Constitution of 1801 pledged 'the Equalization of Civil, Political and Religious Rights' but never the abolition of tripartite government or the destruction of monarchy[32]. Although the limited known details of the Despard conspiracy may have involved an attack upon the King as a necessary part in the seizure of the newly opened parliament[33], there is no reason to suppose from this that he was to be overthrown[34], nor that there was substantial support for such action amongst the United rank and file. It is possible of course that the language of the UB's constitution was intended to mask rather than reveal true intentions, but the large-scale support intermittently enjoyed by the UB in the North and Midlands does not suggest that this was the case. The majority faction on the UB committee during the Despard episode appear to have opposed the seizing of parliament (though not the Tower and Bank) and to have insisted 'that no private property must be meddled with on any pretence whatsoever'[35]. This was not an agenda of

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32. The UB Constitution is reprinted in Roger Wells, Insurrection: The British Experience 1795-1803 (Gloucester 1986), p.221.
33. ibid., p.246.
34. I would maintain this to be largely accurate, although it is true that the authorities arrested two men in Sheffield in December 1802 on suspicion of forming a society 'to work a revolution and take the King off his throne': Marianne Elliott, 'The Despard Conspiracy Reconsidered', Past and Present, 75 (1977), p.54. The Crown case against Despard was consciously constructed to make the conspirators' 'treason' appear beyond doubt however, and evidence of this kind should be treated with caution.
35. ibid., p.57. According to Elliott, it was the disaffected soldiers who wanted parliament invaded.

revolutionary social levelling. Radical tradition looked back to the 1688 Bill of Rights for the twin rights to bear arms and resist tyranny; a practice that would survive amongst members of reform societies at least until the eclipse of Chartism in 1848[36]. Armed resistance to the perceived infringements of English liberties represented by the Gagging Acts and the suspension of Habeas Corpus could thus be legitimised as a patriotic duty to overcome tyranny and corruption. Moreover, the bearing of arms was not confined to radicalism's insurrectionary wing, for a gun and a sword were kept at the rooms of the Bristol Constitutional Society in 1797[37]. The peculiarity of the English revolutionary tradition - and the cause of many of the difficulties it experienced in maintaining momentum - was that the majority of its adherents probably shared a common cultural loyalism and patriotic attachment to the Constitution. One suspects that the real aim of the United movement, like that of physical force Chartism half a century later, was the emplacement of political

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The rest of the conspirators favoured action during recess.

36. For a wider discussion of this belief see James Epstein, 'The Constitutional Idiom: Radical Reasoning, Rhetoric and Action in Early Nineteenth Century England', Journal of Social History (Spring 1990), pp.553-69. For the clarity of Chartist beliefs in the constitutional right to bear arms, see particularly the debate in the National Convention of April 9th 1839, reprinted in F C Mather (ed), Chartism and Society: An Anthology of Documents (London 1980), pp.63-7.
37. Statement of the Facts Relative to the Riot in Union Street (Bristol 1797), p.4. The gun was used against a besieging loyalist crowd in March and subsequently confiscated by the mayor.

reforms, by force of arms because it was considered necessary, to restore the health of a properly balanced status quo.

Paineite philosophy, as expressed in Rights of Man, was represented by its opponents as inimical to the Constitution. Historians have broadly argued that although the book was hugely popular with British radicals, its advocacy of republicanism - like Paine's deism in Age of Reason - was rejected by most of its readers[38]. But the emphasis may have been wrongly placed. Although Part One of Rights of Man (1791) scorned the Settlement of 1688, ridiculed the Constitution as 'cant' and finally condemned mixed government (partly elected, partly hereditary) as inherently corrupt[39], Part Two (1792), which had the greater impact, focussed its attack on 'hereditary government'; the unanswerability of monarchical or aristocratic systems[40]. Although it may still have been implicit that a tripartite system in which these comprise the majority of parts cannot be fairly balanced, Paine did not clarify his objection to the theoretical basis of the British system. His criticisms of monarchy certainly fell within the legal

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38. See for example, John Stevenson, 'Paineites to a Man?', Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History, 54, 3, (Winter 1989), and Albert Goodwin, The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution, (London 1979), pp.174-5.
39. Thomas Paine, Rights of Man, (London 1791/2 - Pelican paperback complete edition, London 1969), pp.113, 153 and 162-4.
40. Thomas Paine, op cit., p.198.

definition of seditious libel[41], but his target began to look more like monarchical absolutism - a system which, at least in theory, had been rejected by all British Constitutionalists a century earlier - than mixed government.

The 'Rights of Man' were defined in Part One of Paine's work by quoting the declaration of the French Assembly: 'Liberty, property, security and resistance of oppression'[42], a description hardly more seditious than the title chosen by John Reeves for his Association for the Protection of Liberty and Property Against Republicans and Levellers. Paine defined republicanism literally in Part Two as 'the public good', a system antagonistic to 'arbitrary power in an individual person' and sympathetic to democracy[43]. What every radical reformer knew however was that the establishment of democracy and the retention of a more limited monarchy were not necessarily mutually exclusive objectives. They did not therefore have to 'ignore' Paine's republicanism (as professor Goodwin claims they did), but merely interpret it.

If loyalism was a territory claimed by reformers and non-reformers alike, innovation - not radicalism - was its

41. For example, 'What is called monarchy always appears to me a silly contemptible thing' (p.204), or 'It requires some talents to be a common mechanic; but to be a king requires only the animal figure of a man - a sort of breathing automaton' (p.196).
42. Thomas Paine, op cit., p.166.
43. Thomas Paine, op cit., pp.200-202.

antithesis. Edmund Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France made a masterly job of equating the fall of monarchy and the institution of more representative government with disorder, poverty and national instability. Not even the English supporters of the Revolution could deny its foundation in the politics of innovation. The conservative attack on radicalism strove to discredit English reformers by portraying them as innovators; friends of a concept wholly alien to British tradition and culture. 'The people of England will not ape the fashions they have never tried', declared Burke, and

> It cannot at this time be too often repeated; line upon line; precept upon precept; until it comes into the currency of a proverb, to innovate is not to reform[44].

As the quotation from Godwin which opens this chapter demonstrates, it became incumbent upon radical theorists not only to deny innovative intent, but to recognise its dangers and disassociate themselves from it. Burke had effectively set an agenda under which radicals were forced to set limits and gradual time-scales for their objectives, the tendency of which was to throw doubt upon the efficacy of sudden suffrage extension whether it came

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44. Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France (London 1790 - Penguin edition 1986), p.119; and Letter to a Noble Lord, quoted in footnote 30, p.382 of the above edition.

about by petition or force of arms. Genuine political progress, claimed Godwin,

> changes the opinions of men by insensible degrees; produces nothing by shock or abruptness; and is far from requiring the calamity of any[45].

Such a concession to the 'friends of antiquity' however, whom Godwin had earlier described as equally obstructive to progress as innovation, but whom he largely ignored in the Enquiry, questioned the very purpose of radical societies since they were clearly provocative to Reevesite sensibilities.

Radicals could legitimately have taken Reevesite loyalism to task for its own crimes of innovation. Reeves' countering of Paine's assault upon hereditary government for instance had lauded the Royal Prerogative as though the Settlement of 1688 had never happened and, on the insistence of the Opposition, Reeves was actually indicted for seditious libel in 1795 for committing his jure divino sentiments to print[46]. The government's suppression of the liberties of speech and assembly were equally open to the charge of innovation. Edward Barry's

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45. William Godwin, op cit., p.787.
46. H T Dickinson, 'Popular Conservatism and Militant Loyalism, 1789-1815' in H T Dickinson (ed), Britain and the French Revolution, 1789-1815 (London 1989), p.105. A discussion of Reeves' jure divino beliefs and their implications for loyalism and constitutionalism appears in J C D Clark, English Society 1688-1832 (Cambridge 1985), pp.263-66. Whilst characteristically appearing sympathetic to Reeves' opinion that the Settlement of 1688 was open to this interpretation, Clark accepts that loyalists used 'doubtful phraseology'(p.263).

Independent Society of Freemen had certainly accused the Bristol Whig and Tory clubs of unconstitutional 'innovations' in 1790 by sanctioning undemocratic electoral coalitions[47]. Yet generally the radicals paid less attention to counter-attacking on innovation than on defending their own loyalism. Occasionally, as John King's 1797 condemnation of Reevesite loyalism at Bristol shows, they moved onto the offensive:

> Are riot and rapine tokens of loyalty? In my opinion they are as contrary as light and darkness; loyalty signifies obedience to the laws of the country and not the blind support of a wretched minister who is striking at the root of our Constitution. I know of no word that has been so grossly perverted as loyalty[48]

Inclusivity and Reevesism.

Whatever the claims of its radical detractors, the most innovative quality of Reevesism was actually mass inclusiveness. This was controversial and not to everybody's taste. As one cleric put it, 'I deprecate the consequence of making every man a politician, and drawing the attention of the lower ranks from labour to

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47. Rev E Barry, Coalitions and Compromises (Bristol 1790).
48. Statement of Facts Relative to the Riot... in Union Street (Bristol 1797).

thinking'[49]. However, raising the status of the common mass was not necessarily the most pressing problem connected with Reevesite inclusivity. In chapter three, I argued that the mere act of signing an RA's membership book could not be taken as proof of a genuine attachment to Reevesism. The Chard Association even found that some of those 'inimical to the present government - either from malignant motives or fearful to oppose the general voice of the country' had been joining it. The Association blamed the blandness of its pro-constitutional propaganda and resolved to tighten up the language of its official statements to exclude unwanted elements. The changes they proposed however, designed to restrict membership to Anglicans, did not address the central problem - that RA language had been chosen for its uncontroversial inclusiveness specifically to appeal to a wide audience[50]. Officially, the RAs stood for the defence not of William Pitt, but of the Constitution, and virtually everybody was in favour of that; most reformers included[51].

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49. Quoted by N U Murray, The Influence of the French Revolution on the Church of England and its Rivals (D Phil thesis, Oxford, 1975), p.227.
50. Reeves Papers, Add.Ms 16924, Edwards to Moore, 24/1/1793
51. Though by no means all. A Taunton man, prosecuted for making pro-republican remarks in 1793, had previously been vetted as loyal by the local RA's solicitors: TS11/1007/4053, Southey & Beadon to Chamberlaine & White 22/3/1793.

The language employed by the Bath Association in its original statement of intent is illuminating[52]. Firstly they pledged 'firm and loyal attachment to his majesty's person and government and the present Constitution of King, Lords and Commons'. Most radicals were opposed to neither the Constitution or the King. They were opposed to his present government but then so were the Opposition Whigs who collaborated in the founding of the RA parent body in London. The phrase demands loyalty to the constitutional right of the King's ministers to govern, rather than agreement with their measures; or at least it is easily interpreted to mean as much. Secondly, the Association wished to suppress any organisation which aimed to 'alienate the minds of his Majesty's subjects from their due allegiance', a purely anti-republican clause. Those radicals - the majority - who were committed to restoring the balance of the Constitution cannot have considered themselves republicans and need not have found this difficult to swallow.

Finally, the Association would oppose 'the Wild Doctrine of EQUALITY, newly propagated'. The loyalist position on equality was ambiguous, and the Bath RA did not supply a precise definition. In a long preamble, their statement enthused about the English Constitutional tradition of equality before the law but made no specific denunciation

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52. The following extracts are all from resolutions agreed by the RA at its first public meeting on December 8th, and published as a handbill. A copy survives in the Minute Book.

of an equal suffrage[53]. The 'wild doctrine' they were contesting was simply that which would 'destroy subordination between man and man'. In other words, the complete levelling of social relations. A graphic illustration of the evils this might entail came before the County Quarter Sessions in 1794. A Bath working man had forced his way into the home of a gentleman and demanded an audience with him since

> We are all men and I am as good a Man as you; these are times of Liberty and Equality and we are all alike.

His reluctant host disagreed:

> I am not acquainted with that species of Liberty and Equality that seems to have turned your head; the only Liberty and Equality that the English Constitution knows is that which places every subject upon a level before a tribunal before the law of the land, and it is to that I mean now to appeal for justice when you and I shall be equal[54].

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53. The loyalist attitude to equality at law was illustrated at the trial of Thomas Wylde at Bath for sedition in 1794. The prosecution argued that Wylde was against a government that 'gave him equal protection from injuries, as to the man of the greatest propetry'. Bath Herald 3/5/1794.

54. Quarter Session Rolls, Easter 1794, Q/SR 362/2 Somerset County Record Office. 'Liberty' was an emotive issue, however. Loyalists wished to define it to their advantage rather than deny it, but were conscious that 'the vile doctrines of the present age... may perhaps represent even the Union of Parties as an Union of Property against Liberty - and the ill-intentioned will make tools of the desperate to the utter destruction of all government'; Savernake Estate Papers, Brand to the Earl of Ailesbury, 25/12/1792, WRO 1300/3851 Wiltshire County Record Office.

The unwelcome intruder was gaoled for a month, not on a charge of sedition but for common assault. The statement of the Bath RA seems to assume that such language was deeply seditious because it was out of sympathy with the present Constitution. Radicals would have denied that this was true, and reaffirmed their belief in a properly balanced tripartite constitution. Social levelling, as I have argued already, does not seem to have been on the agenda for most advocates of parliamentary reform. Radicals charged with sedition, as I have suggested in chapter three, could not always expect an impartial trial under English law, but rather than undermine popular faith in the 'equality' of the English judicial system, such discrepancies were simply seen by many radicals as further proof of constitutional corruption. Many, like LCS stalwart John Binns, continued to believe that

> the freedom of speech and of the press in England from the days of Jefferies have been mainly indebted for their preservation to the intelligence and independence of English jurors[55].

Such views were confirmed and strengthened in the South West by, for instance, the Somerset assize jury who initially refused to convict Peter Sequest in 1798 because they doubted his <u>intention</u> to commit sedition, and by the remarks of Justice Buller at the assize in 1794, after a jury had convicted a man for assaulting an Ilminster radical who refused to 'drink damnation to the

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55. John Binns, <u>Recollections of the Life of John Binns</u> (Philadelphia, 1854), p.287.

principles of Thomas Paine'. 'A man's principles', ruled the judge, 'were no justification for abuse and insult'[56]. Radicals' belief in the jury system and the sound principles of English law amplifies rather than detracts from the argument that Pitt's 'reign of terror' was a reality, for it implies the corruption of legal rights and liberties by the cynical manipulation of law.

The declaration of the Bristol grand jurors, referred to in chapter two, affords another interesting example of 'loyalist' imprecision. Asked whether radical societies had been active in Bristol, they defined their terms of reference to be the detection of 'attempts to disturb the public mind and to disseminate wild and theoretical opinions totally subversive of Peace and good government'. They considered it their

> duty by every possible means to promote and encourage such Dispositions as may best ensure a continuation of the blessings of good order and civil liberty.

The jury were no more precise than that, but confirmed their loyalty to the King and Constitution. It was quite different for example to the loyal address submitted in June 1792 by the Merchant Venturers which equated the 'wealth and happiness of the nation' with a 'zealous attachment to the government and constitution' (my emphasis). The grand jury's declaration would not have been offensive to the majority of reformers, an assertion

56. Bath Chronicle, 23/8/1798 & 10/4/1794.

supported by the presence on the jury of William Peter Lunnell, a merchant of radical opinions who later allied himself with the Fox/Coleridge circle. He does not appear to have found it difficult to sign the Address[57].

Accommodating language may have eased passive participation in Reevesism amongst the politically uncommitted and even, as at Chard, amongst some reformers. In practice however, this vocabulary of moderation was qualified by expressions of inclusivity which sought to exclude undesirable minorities. The Reevesite pamphleteer 'A W' for instance sought to distance the 'citizens of Bristol' from the politics of Edward Long Fox and Coleridge in 1795 by appealing to a presumed sense of parochial civic identity. Fox, Coleridge and other members of their circle were

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57. Bristol Quarter Session papers, May 1792-March 1793, Address of the grand jury to the Recorder, Richard Burke, Bristol Public Record Office. The presentation of loyal addresses appear to have been looked upon by some gentlemen as a rather mercenary exercise which bound government to certain contractual obligations. Lord Colville sent his own son to Londn to present a loyal address from Bath in 1792, but expected Henry Dundas to reward him with a naval commission. Three years later, George Colebrooke suggested that the carrier of another loyal address from the city to London should be knighted for his efforts: 'I think that it will be agreeable to him and that he expects the offer'; HO 42/20, Colville to Dundas 28/6/1792, and HO 42/36, Colebrooke to Portland 18/11/1795. For the Merchant Venturers' address see W E Minchinton (ed), Politics and the Port of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century: The Petitions of the Society of Merchant Venturers, 1698-1803 (Bristol Record Society 1963), pp.179-80. The Venturers' attachment to Pitt's government was less pronounced by 1795 when an anti-war clause was almost added to another loyal address but withdrawn after a vote: ibid., p.183.

described by A W as 'a few factious aliens'; outsiders not only in the sense that they were dissenters, and enthusiasts for the ideology of a foreign power (the word 'alien', as encompassed by the Alien Act, carried clear associations with French nationals in Britain), but also because they did not come from Bristol. Fox, a Cornishman by birth, was therefore to be excluded from the civic consensus as a meddling outsider. Coleridge understood the innuendo and fought back, ridiculing Bristolian self-absorbtion as an excuse for aristocratic dominance and corruption: 'I glory that I am an alien in your city', he told A W[58]. At the parliamentary election of 1796, the Foxite Whigs, accustomed as they were to charges of political outsiderism, deliberately promoted Benjamin Hobhouse at Bristol as 'a native' of the city and a friend to commerce. It availed them no detectable advantage however[59].

I have argued that, as a general rule, the tenor of Association language was accommodating and imprecise. Therefore, taken together with the coercive circumstances under which membership was invited, the mass 'popularity' of the RAs is unremarkable. It was not simply a fact that 'in most places where these Associations were established the loyalists easily outnumbered the local radicals', as

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58. A W, A Letter to Edward Long Fox, MD (Bristol 1795); S T Coleridge, An Answer to a Letter to Edward Long Fox (Bristol 1795).
59. The events described here are all detailed in chapter two.

H T Dickinson would have us believe[60]. The fact that the vast majority of those who joined played no active part in loyalist politics (nor were they 'members' of the RA in any meaningful sense), makes the achievement of Reevesism a little less mysterious and exposes the weaknesses that caused its rapid decline after about eighteen months. The Bath Association Committee, which had begun by meeting weekly in December 1792, was forced by non-attendance to lower its quorum and meet monthly after March 1793. As meetings became increasingly sporadic and purposeless, the Association ground to a complete halt in April 1794[61]. Even at the height of its influence in the winter of 1792-3, despite the loyalist window dressing of the Paine effigy burnings and impressively long membership lists, the Association movement singularly failed to obliterate popular radicalism. It did not simply 'cease active operations because they had so easily overwhelmed the local radicals'[62]. The radical societies emerged from their bunkers in 1794, still ostracized as regicides, still facing harassment in the workplace, and still under threat from the law courts, but they were not unable to operate. The 6000 members of the Bath Association proved remarkably acquiescent. The conviction of Thomas Wylde for sedition at Bath that year may have caused 'vast joy

60. H T Dickinson, 'Popular Conservatism and Militant Loyalism 1789-1815' in H T Dickinson (ed), Britain and the French Revolution 1789-1815 (London 1989), p.116.
61. See appropriate entries in the Minute Book
62. H T Dickinson, 'Popular Conservatism', op cit., p.116.

in court by the populace', but the town clerk accepted that the 'populace' in question were 'persons of some rank and distinction' and not members of the lower orders[63]. Former signatories to the RA's membership book may even have become receptive to the radicals' critique of Association-sponsored extra-constitutionalism. As the Bristol Constitutional Society postulated:

> We ask whether an attempt to establish a kind of inquisitorial institution, whereby the liberty of opinion is suppressed - where each man is excited to act as a spy upon his neighbour - where we are beset by a legion of venal and corrupt informers... is consistent with the spirit of liberty which we boast that we enjoy superior to the rest of mankind[64].

Abolitionism and the Roots of Consensus.

The seemingly mixed attitudes of the Sherbourne Mercury to constitutional issues has already been remarked upon. The paper was also an advocate of the abolition of the slave trade in the spring of 1792, a movement in which historians have sometimes seen the roots of radicalism and Francophilia more visibly than those of anti-radical loyalism[65]. Yet there were just as many prominent

63. TS11/1071/5056, Jefferies to White, 29/4/1794
64. Address... op cit., p.14
65. See J Walvin, 'Abolishing the Slave Trade; Anti-Slavery and Popular Radicalism 1776-1806' in Emsley & Walvin (eds) Artisans, Peasants and Proletarians (London 1985), P.42.

abolitionists in the loyalist camp by December 1792 as there were amongst the radicals. At Bristol, the quaker merchant family of Harford were zealous anti-slavers but also Pittite loyalists. John Hunter, the chairman of the first abolitionist meeting held at Bath went on to become a committee member of the city's Reeves Association. The mayor of Taunton, Dr Cabell, favoured abolition in February 1792 but he was not evident in any subsequent or previous reform movements. Instead he proposed a loyal address to the crown in June 1792 which was emphatic in its denunciation of 'speculative reform amendments' to the existing constitution and swore vigilance against any seditious activity in Taunton[66]. The Bristol alderman and sugar-refiner, George Daubeny, as vociferous an opponent of radicalism as any in that city during the 1790s, joined the abolitionist committee in 1788, but changed sides a year later when he backed the powerful Merchant Venturers' campaign to preserve the trade[67]. There can be no doubt that the abolitionist cause was injured by the war of words between radicals and loyalists in 1792, for suddenly it appeared that any kind of reform might

66. For Joseph Harford see P Marshall, The Anti-Slave Trade Movement in Bristol (Bristol Historical Assoc Pamphlet 1968), P.5; The Star (London newspaper) 20/11/1795; Bristol Mercury 6/2/1797; Bristol Gazette 15/6/1797. For J S Harford see DNB. For Hunter see Bath Journal 20/2/1792 and Bath Reeves Association Minute Book, Bath Guildhall Record Office. For Cabell see Sherborne Mercury 5/3/1792 and 18/6/1792.
67. P Marshall, The Anti-Slave Trade Movement in Bristol (Bristol Historical Association 1968), pp.6 & 12. For the Merchant Venturer's petition see W E Minchinton (ed), Politics and the Port of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century: The Petitions of the Society of Merchant Venturers, 1698-1803 (Bristol Record Society, 1963), pp.178-9.

threaten national security. Thomas Clarkson recalled with some bitterness:

> They represented our Committee, though it had existed before the French Revolution or the Rights of Man were heard of, as a nest of Jacobins; and they held up the cause... as affording an opportunity of overthrowing the State[68].

The key to understanding the link between support for the RA movement and support for abolitionism lies within the language in which these ideas expressed themselves. Abolitionists and loyalists alike expressed fears of disorder. Thomas Beddoes may have been considered dangerous enough in 1792 to be placed under government surveillance, but he held firm convictions against violent revolt whether it be started by oppressed slaves or hungry English workers. He favoured not self-determination amongst slaves but the 'wisdom and humanity of the planters' which he felt sure would 'appease the spirit of insurrection by softening the harsh conditions of bondage'[69]. These conditions needed softening in the eyes of many people for the simple reason that the English Constitution and the enlightened social order it was claimed to represent demanded it. To make matters more pressing, republican France had abolished slavery by decree because of its inconsistency with the rights of

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68. Thomas Clarkson, History of the Abolition of the Slave Trade, Vol 2 (London 1808), P.209.
69. Thomas Beddoes, Where Would be the Harm of a Speedy Peace? (Bristol 1795).

man. It thus became vital for the English to demonstrate opposition to both unenlightened repression and the rights of man as an important plank in the propaganda platform of Francophobic loyalism. The gift of Liberty should be given cautiously, paternally and gradually to avoid the consequences of French foolishness either in Paris (terror) or San Domingue (more terror). As a contributor to the Bath Chronicle expressed it:

> I am against any emancipation of the slaves in our colonies in the present day. Men should first be prepared for Liberty to make a proper use of it, otherwise you will plunge them into greater miseries than what you relieve them from[70].

Opposition to the slave trade could therefore carry the obligation of patriotic duty - but only once the terms of that opposition had been established. A petition from Wellington argued for abolition because the slave trade was 'cruel and disgraceful to a free and enlightened people'. It was every Briton's duty moreover, to

> show the surrounding nations that this happy country is distinguished by its regard to the principles of justice and humanity as well as sound policy[71].

The petitioners of Wilton agreed. The slave trade, they believed, was 'inconsistent with the principles of our excellent constitution'[72]. The men who formulated and passed resolutions such as these would not all become

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70. Bath Chronicle 9/2/1792
69. Sherborne Mercury 5/3/1792
72. Salisbury Journal 19/3/1792

Reevesite loyalists by December, but a good many of them did. Assuming they did not suffer a sudden political sea-change in the process, the inference must be that the men who supported John Reeves were not necessarily opposed to 'iconoclastic' reforms per se. The imprecision of Reevesism may have been the cause of its supporters misunderstanding or ignoring its generalised language of antagonism to all innovative reforms proposed in the name of 'freedom'.

Methods used in the mobilisation and manipulation of public opinion for and against the cause of abolitionism in the Spring of 1792 were not lost upon the architects of Reevesism. Pro-slavers had been alarmed at the ease with which a few influential men in each locality had been able to marshal public opinion against the trade. As the letter from a 'plain well meaning man' published in the Salisbury Journal put it in April,

> The squire is a rich man and they say printed a book of verses some years ago , so I thought he must be a wise man; moreover he is my landlord and he said, 'Thomas, it is your duty to sign against this unchristian wickedness', and so I signed. Many thousands set their name to these petitions in the same manner, for we in the country know nothing of what is doing in India and Africa and those parts but what we are told...[73]

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73. Salisbury Journal 16/4/1792.

These claims may have carried an element of truth, but they described precisely the methods used by the RAs a few months later to ensure massive membership lists and imply anti-radical consensus. Opponents of abolition alleged that

> every art had been used to obtain names; grammar schools had been canvassed and the boys induced not only to sign their own names but the name of every person they could recollect[74].

Yet when schoolboys were found to have signed the Bath RA's membership book, loyalists were delighted for it showed they had been 'bred by their parents to respect the KING and CONSTITUTION'[75].

Loyalists adopted the 'language of consensus', as John Bohstedt has called it, in their own petitioning, but this was largely pioneered by the abolitionists of 1792. In the earlier wave of abolitionist petitioning in 1788, a tentative move towards mass participation had been made. Only thirty per cent of the petitions sent to parliament in that year had come from the traditional elite or restricted audience of corporate bodies, freemen and gentry. This was a far smaller number than the eighty-nine per cent received on behalf of John Wilkes between 1769 and 1770, but in 1792 abolitionist petitions set a new precedent for mass participation. Not only were

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74. Bath Journal 9/4/1792.
75. Quoted from the London World by J Caulfield, The Reeves Association: A Study of Loyalism in the 1790s (Ph D thesis, Reading 1988), p.44.

they huge in number (519 altogether), but eighty five per cent of them came from an unrestricted public[76]. A large number, certainly, came from the 'principal inhabitants' or 'principal inhabitants and tradesmen' of a town[77], presumably to emphasise the respectability of the sentiments expressed. Although the number of signatories points to a wider circulation, the formulation and direction of local campaigning remained the concern of a restricted elite - as did the management of Reeves Associations. A meeting to draw up an abolitionist petition at Bath for example, was ostensibly unrestricted, but the timing (11 am on a Friday) cannot have been arranged with unrestricted attendance as its object[78]. Charges of corrupt petitioning had been common for many years, and the trend towards inclusivity only increased the likelihood in later years. The doubts and derision which greeted Chartist claims that their third National Petition of 1848 contained nearly six million genuine signatures are well known, but the demands of consensus by enumeration provided much stronger opportunities for corruption amongst those classes for whom bribery was a more viable option. In 1820 for example, corrupt collusion between businessmen and the judiciary was alleged to be behind a 'consensus' petition in which all the weavers of Bradford on Avon

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76. Percentages calculated by Seymour Drescher in Capitalism and Anti-Slavery (London 1986), p.74.
77. Salisbury Journal 5/3/1792.
78. Bath Journal 20/2/1792.

were called upon, upon pain of being dismissed, to sign a petition to parliament against the Wool Tax. Many can't even tell what the petition was about. Our magistrate, J Tugwell Esq, as a principal manufacturer, took the lead[79].

Inclusivity then, was largely a matter of appearances, whether employed by Reevesites or abolitionists. Most RAs followed the anti-slavery committees in publicly emphasising the inter-denominational support for their petitions and addresses. In practice, Anglican and dissenting clergy were equally attracted to the leadership of provincial abolitionism[80] but, as will be seen in chapter six, there were considerable difficulties facing their assimilation into Reevesism. The Bath Chronicle, a supporter of both, considered it important that 'every denomination' had been party to an anti-slavery petition from the West Wiltshire weaving towns in 1792[81]. Press support for abolitionism, as with Reevesism, was a crucial factor in the success of the strategy of inclusivity for it inferred a necessity for interest and approval amongst the readership. The publication, week by week, of the submission of each new abolitionist petition from around the region lent the movement an impressive appearance of 'unanimous' public opinion, and a very similar style of journalism emerged

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79. HO 52/1, H Daubeny to Sidmouth, 16/5/1820.
80. See composition of Bristol committee in 1787 and 1788 for example; P Marshall, op cit., pp.2 & 5.
81. Bath Chronicle, 22/3/1792.

at the triumphant inception of Reevesism. Newspapers therefore encouraged broad popular support and participation in these movements. Participation in abolitionism was not confined to signing petitions. The Bath Journal and the Chronicle both encouraged sugar boycotts, applauded their spread and rejoiced in their success; indeed, newspapers would play a very similar influential role as the encouragers of 'respectable' regulation by boycott during future scarcities[82]. The Chronicle's editor, Richard Crutwell, swung the weight of his paper behind abolitionism in 1788 following personal canvassing from Clarkson, 'impressing his mind in a forcible manner on the subject'[83]. Prior to the Royal Proclamation against sedition, the Chronicle had also been sympathetic to parliamentary reform, but Crutwell's mind appears to have been impressed yet again for he suddenly stopped publishing communications from the Friends of the People and substituted unashamedly Reevesite reports of parliamentary debates:

> Mr Pitt, in a speech replete with eloquence and argument, replied to every one of Mr Fox's

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82. For example, Bath Journal 20/2/1792: 'It is computed that 180 millions of human beings have been deprived of life to gratify the palates of those who consume the produce of their labour - that Europeans might be supplied with sugar'; Bath Chronicle 9/2/1792 claimed sugar sales were down 'by 12 or 13 hundred a week' because of the boycott at Frome. The reactionary Bath Herald, which remained sympathetic to the slave trade went out of its way to ridicule and disarm the boycotting movement: 7/4/1792. For a fuller discussion of the press, regulation and provision boycotts see chapter eight.
83. T Clarkson, op cit., 1, pp.365-6.

> arguments, and in the clearest manner justified the conduct of the administration[84].

John Bohstedt deduces the progress of consensus language amongst loyalists from the pro-Gagging Bills petition of '<u>the</u> inhabitants' of Manchester in 1795, said to have been agreed 'unanimously'. A radical counter-petition claimed only to be the work of the '<u>undersigned</u> inhabitants', passed by 'an immense majority'[85]. This may demonstrate a greater degree of concern amongst loyalists than amongst radicals to manipulate facts through the language of consensus for, as Bohstedt acknowledges but does not follow up, the radicals' claim that they had the larger number of signatures was not contradicted by their opponents. On the other hand, it must be noted that the languages of inclusivity employed by radicals and loyalists did not necessarily draw upon identical vocabularies. Dror Wahrman has recently shown how supposedly objective newspaper reports of parliamentary debates imposed a factional 'class' language upon speeches. An opposition MP, reported using the phrase 'tradesmen' or 'lower orders' in the pro-ministerial press might find his words translated as 'middle-classes' in the opposition press[86]. Wahrman argues that small

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84. <u>Bath Chronicle</u>, 31/5/1792. For the Friends of the People see editions of 3/5/1792; 10/5/1792 and 17/5/1792.
85. John Bohstedt, <u>Riots and Community Politics in England and Wales, 1790-1810</u> (Hasrvard 1983), p.123.
86. Dror Wahrman, 'Virtual Representation: Parliamentary Reporting and Languages of Class in the 1790s', <u>Past & Present</u>, 136 (August 1992), pp.83-113.

property-owners and business men (those whom Chartists would one day dub the 'shopocracy') who opposed the war ministry for commercial reasons contrived to appropriate the economic term, 'middling orders' or 'middle classes' and give it a social and cultural resonance to prevent accusations of jacobinism. If sections within this economic group wished to infer hostility to Pitt as the common interest of all middling men, this was certainly inclusive language, although it is equally certain that in practice these same 'classes' were the backbone of both Reevesism and the Volunteers. At Wincanton for instance, the chairman and secretary of the RA simultaneously occupied precisely the same positions on the committee of businessmen developing the Somerset and Dorset canal project. At the village of Creech St Michael, an RA was formed by a committee of principal farmers[87].

'Middle class language' in which a division is created between respectable reform and a 'lower class' tendency for extravagant innovation became considerably more common in the early nineteenth century, as the statements of Thomas Poole's Constitutional Club of 1822, quoted above, were to show. Introducing its programme, W A Sandford declared the 'middle class' to be 'the most

87. Sherbourne Mercury, 31/12/1792 and 4/2/1793. For social composition of 'average' RA committees see John Caulfield, The Reeves Association: a Study of Loyalism in the 1790s (Ph.D thesis, Reading 1988), p.266. RA hierarchies in the South West were mostly representative of the smaller landowners (rural areas) and professional classes (urban areas).

virtuous part of the community' and likened the population as a whole to a barrel of ale, 'the top froth, the middle sound, and the bottom dregs'[88]. The quest for inclusivity never induced the use of 'middle-class' language amongst Reevesites however for it was felt that the objective of broad national consensus was best advanced by the more simplistic expectation that the low should follow the example of the high. This would not be achieved through the promotion of the particular interests of a 'class'; indeed loyalist propaganda was often insistent that the economic domestic hardships of a 'just and necessary' war fell equally upon all classes.

Radical consensus language surfaced most visibly in the use of the term, 'the People', eschewed by Reevesism for its connotations of popular sovereignty. The 'constitutional rights of the people' for instance, were offered by Edward Long Fox and John Rose as reason enough for their anti-war amendment to Bristol Corporation's loyal address in 1795 to be properly considered. George Daubeny countered by denying that the people had any rights to comment upon the affairs of government at all[89]. The assumption of a writer in the Sherborne Mercury that reform 'can only diminish the burdens of the People (and) silence the contention of Parties', implied benefits for the nation as a whole against 'ministerial corruption'[90]. This language appeared again in the

88. Bath & Cheltenham Gazette, 9/4/1822.
89. See The Star, 21/11/1795.
90. Sherbourne Mercury, 5/3/1792.

utterances of the progressive or 'radical' methodist faction during the 'sacramental controversy' at Bristol in 1794. The populist preacher Henry Moore was accused by his conservative critics of masquerading as 'the man of the People's choice', whilst his colleague Thomas Coke announced persuasively, 'God is with us and the People are with us'[91]. The disenfranchised freemen of Bath poured scorn upon the Corporation's petition for a new Police Bill in March 1792, contrasting it with the inclusivity of the contemporaneous abolitionist petition as

> 'exclusively the petition of the Mayor, Aldermen and Common Council of this city... They may be scientific physicians, expert lawyers or active tradesmen; but as Corporation men the people know them not. They have no voice in their election, nor share in their counsels... (my emphasis)[92].

Whilst a restricted franchise and Corporate exclusivity were agreed by most reformers to be classic symptoms of imbalance, many closed Corporations developed a combative relationship with their critics that over-ran class or social/economic boundaries. At Bath, where dissenting reformers and freemen were united by the call for a wider franchise, the Corporation appeared antagonistic to abolitionism because men whom it regarded as its natural

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89. T S A MacQuiban, 'The Sacramental Controversy in Bristol in the 1790s', Bulletin of the Bristol branch of the Wesley Historical Association, 60 (1991), pp.4-5 & 7. This important dispute is discussed in greater detail in chapter six.
92. Bath Chronicle 1/3/1792.

enemies were in favour of it. The Anglican-dominated Corporation had already expressed opposition to the agitation against the Test Acts in 1791, but in 1792 the mayor was accused of refusing the abolitionists permission to assemble in the Guildhall[93]. Similar tensions developed at Bristol. The 1793 debacle on Bristol Bridge in which the deaths of an unconfirmed number of demonstrators were blamed upon Bristol Corporation, resulted in an equally entrenched and angry dialogue. The Corporation closed ranks and refused calls for an independent inquiry, then levelled accusations of radicalism and anti-loyalism against all who opposed them. The wide and changeable terms of reference used to describe 'loyalist' or 'radical' behaviour makes the serious assessment of the prevalence of either extremely difficult. At least one member of Fox's Committee for Investigating Bridge Affairs, James Morgan, was a prominent anti-abolitionist[94].

Although Reevesite polemic generally avoided entreaties to 'the People', the language was appropriated by francophobic patriots during the invasion crisis of 1803 and hitched to the ministerial war effort. Calls upon 'the People' to enrol as Volunteers in defence of British

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93. See Bath Register 3/3/1792; Bath Chronicle 1/3/1792; Bath Journal 20/2/1792 and 27/2/1792; and Shickle, Corporation Minute Book (Typescript), Bath Public Library.
94. For Morgan see Minutes of the Committee, op cit., and the list of signatories to an anti-abolitionist resolution at a public meeting of Bristol Merchants, Bath Journal 20/4/1789.

national values borrowed freely from a lexicon of liberalism that had never been appropriate to the RAs. Publicola's open letter 'To the People of England' in the Bath Journal characterised Napoleonic France as oppressive, autocratic and intolerant - quite unlike constitutional Albion with its 'freedom of debate' and 'liberty of the press'. 'An Ancient Briton', also addressing himself 'To the People', urged all his 'countrymen and neighbours' to 'unite and be as one man'. England's cherished civil and religious liberties, he proclaimed, were under threat as never before[95]. In fact, every one of these liberties and freedoms had been under threat during Pitt's 'reign of terror', but this was not the time to confuse simplistic argument with incompatible detail. Rowlandson's famed Reevesite print of 1793, 'The Contrast', may have delivered a similar verdict upon the French, but his own version of 'British Liberty' invoked far less controversial values than those cherished by Publicola and Ancient Briton in 1803. Rowlandson opted for 'Religion' rather than 'religious liberty', and 'Justice' and 'Obedience to the Laws' rather than 'civil liberty'. Neither freedom of debate nor the liberty of the press found a place in Rowlandson's canon of constitutional values[96].

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95. Bath Journal 29/8/1803.
96. Thomas Rowlandson, The Contrast (1793). The remaining rather imprecise virtues were listed as 'Morality, Loyalty, Independence, Personal Security, Inheritance, Protection, Property, Industry, National Prosperity and Happiness'.

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This chapter has demonstrated that the political opinions of men and women in the 1790s were not as straightforward as they are frequently represented. The fact that James Losh, radical friend of Beddoes, Coleridge, Southey and Godwin, was able to support meetings organised by that circle whilst still attending regular gatherings of the Bath Catch Club in the convivial company of another friend, Dr Henry Harington, did not appear contradictory to him[97]. There was indeed a strong current of social and political cohesion uniting the English people during the 1790s, and it may broadly if not very usefully be described as loyalism, but its boundaries were not drawn by John Reeves. Political allegiance was often characterised by manoeuvrability, not intransigence within the reductionist straight-jacketting of Reevesite polemic. The 'success' claimed by Reevesite loyalism in the conflict of ideas was therefore less clear-cut than its rhetoric, and the judgement of some historians, might suggest.

Horror of innovation, as the following chapters will demonstrate, both informed and transcended the debate over political reform for it also overshadowed the politics of the workplace, religious dissent, and the

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97. Losh Diaries, Carlisle City Library, Cumberland: several entries in 1796 and after. Losh was from Newcastle, but lived at Bath from January 1796 to 1798.

regulation of relief during scarcity. The readiness of workers to perceive the introduction of manufacturing machinery as an unacceptable innovation on traditions of custom and practice rendered employers' denials that it would create unemployment quite hopeless. This in turn made the development of trades union consciousness a far more realistic proposition than mass support for reform amongst the lower orders, despite radical insistence that disenfranchisement at the ballot box and at work were equally unjust. Religious dissent was dismissed as an innovation by supporters of the Established Church with consummate ease, for it could be little else, and within methodism itself, the language of innovation was used to accentuate the divide between Old Church and Sacramentalist factions[98]. The enormous opposition encountered by William Pitt in his attempts to impose Smithonian laissez-faire solutions onto the problems of scarcity points not only to the longevity of the 'moral economy', but also to one of its driving forces - the anathema of innovation. Pitt would encounter similar difficulties during the debate over the tripling of the assessed taxes in 1797, when he was taunted by the opposition for his 'new-fangled' invention[99]. In emphasising the danger of innovations during its ideological war against radical reform, the Pitt regime

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98. See chapter six and T S A MacQuiban, op cit.
99. Quoted from the Morning Chronicle by Wahrman in his discussion of the debate over the taxes, op cit., p.95.

had unwittingly sabotaged the implementation of its own future policies.

Chapter Five

Invasion, War, and National Service: The Rise of Volunteering

The growth of popular opposition to the seemingly unresolvable war with France was noted in chapter two. A wish for peace and economic rejuvenation could not be equated with a wish to encourage French ambitions to invade Britain however, even by many of those who remained sympathetic to French republican ideology. This chapter considers popular attitudes to invasion in the South West, and to the United movement's efforts to inspire sympathetic English risings. It examines relations between the armed services and civilian populations, the success of recruiting drives and the formation, motivation and usefulness of Volunteering. The popularity of the Volunteers has often been seen as proof of British patriotism, especially during the invasion crises of 1797 and 1803, but as I have already argued, it would be a mistake to use patriotism or a consensus of opinion against invasion as an index to enthusiasm for the agenda of Reevesism. The Volunteers, and their role

in anti-invasion inclusivity (mass mobilisation), were nevertheless a vital component of the myth of national unity; a myth, I shall argue, which may have been every bit as important to national survival as that fostered in Churchill's England during the 'finest hours' of 1940.

Invasion

In December 1796, a fleet of French ships anchored in Bantry Bay, Ireland, in severe weather before abandoning their invasion effort and returning to Brest. From this moment onwards, United Irish hopes for co-operation from the English radicals began in earnest, and more specifically, hopes for a diversionary uprising at Bristol and other west coast ports were developed. Meanwhile, in the aftermath of Hoche's ill-fated and expensive expedition, the American ex-merchantman, William Tate, gathered together a second force, numbering around a thousand French army renegades, prisoners and Bantry Bay survivors, and sailed himself towards the British mainland. The circumstances of his arrival, landing, and ignominious surrender at Carregwasted Point, Pembrokeshire, are well known[1]. Of greater consequence for the Bristol region however are the orders he did not carry out. For, like Hoche before him, Tate was disadvantaged by stormy seas and only landed in Wales

1. But see M Elliott, Partners In Revolution: The United Irishmen and France (Yale 1982), pp.116-23 for the best modern account, or E H Jones, The Last Invasion Of Britain (Cardiff 1950), for a more popular and gung-ho description.

because he was unable (or unwilling[2]) to follow his original instructions, which were:

> to execute a coup de main on Bristol, which is the second city in England for riches and commerce; the destruction of Bristol is of the very last importance and every possible effort should be made to accomplish it.

To this end, he was to

> sail up the Avon at nightfall, within five miles of the town, where the landing should be made on the right bank in the greatest silence, and the troops being supplied with combustible matter, Colonel Tate is to advance rapidly in the dark on that side of Bristol which may be to windward and immediately to set fire to that quarter. If the enterprise is conducted with dexterity, it cannot fail to produce the total ruin of the town, the port, the docks and the vessels and to strike terror and amazement into the very heart of the capital of England[3].

Given the unimpressive size and quality of Tate's command, the attempt would have been wild and reckless even in good weather. Even if fortunate enough to effect, and then escape from the blazing ruins of Bristol, Tate's small force was unlikely to succeed in the second part of

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2. It is suggested in F MacDermot, Theobald Wolfe Tone and his Times (Dublin 1939), p.211, that Tate simply 'lost heart' in the Bristol Channel'.
3. Tate's instructions are reproduced in H F B Wheeler & A M Broadley, Napoleon and the Invasion of England: The Great Terror (London 1908), pp.39-41.

its mission which was to advance north towards Liverpool. In fact, Tate's departure from France and landing in Britain made no sense at all once it became known that Hoche's expedition to Ireland had been such a disaster. Tate's instructions were intended to create diversions at English ports, and so demoralise the English whilst preventing the embarkation of troops to fight Hoche in Ireland. But when Tate set sail, Hoche was already back in France. Tate may possibly have been banking on English support for the French at Bristol to boost the size and effectiveness of his army, but even those radicals who found the city's commerce and opulence so distasteful were unlikely to be impressed by French plans to burn their houses down and terrorise their communities. In Ireland, where the French looked to an oppressed and rebellious people to treat them as saviours when they landed, both the Directory and the United Irish leadership were emphatic that civic destruction or land seizures would not be tolerated. Tate's instructions seem to assume the opposite - that no joint or independent uprising could be expected at Bristol, and that therefore the only option was one of destruction. In Paris, Wolfe Tone considered it a somewhat desperate solution, but he remained philosophical:

> The conflagration of such a city as Bristol! It is no slight affair; thousands and thousands of families, if the attempt succeeds, will be reduced

to beggary. I cannot help it! If it must be, it must[4].

The only damage actually done however, was to French and United ambitions for the future, and these were largely self-inflicted wounds. When interrogation and document seizure revealed the detail of Tate's intentions, the English domestic reaction, particularly at Bristol, was indeed one of 'terror and amazement'. And it gave an immense boost to popular ministerial loyalism in the spring of 1797, making United success in planting an effective insurrectionary cell at Bristol doubly unlikely. The weeks following the Pembroke landing witnessed the attack on the Constitutional Society's rooms, renewed magisterial interference with radical activity, and a beating in the street for the UB emissary, William Bennett. Secondly, the blundering nature of the Pembroke attempt made it all the less likely that any subsequent, better mounted effort would ever reach Bristol. Tate's landing had exposed the ineptitude of British naval defence and the ineffectiveness of the Channel blockade. The truth was that the country's military strategists considered the Somerset coast and the approaches to Bristol would 'demand such peculiar and great arrangements to attack them, that they probably do not enter into the contemplation of an Enemy'. Now that they knew different, gun-boats were immediately despatched to the Channel by a

4. Quoted in E H Jones, Op Cit., pp.58-9.

jittery War Office, civilian longboats fitted with cannon, and a year later, eight 36-pounder guns installed to guard the Avon approaches at Portishead and Kingsroad[5].

It seems highly probable that whatever moves were being made by the United movement to forge an armed republican coalition in London and the North West at this juncture, there was little prospect of popular support for it in the South West. Few radicals relished a French invasion of their country, even after the Bantry Bay and Pembroke affairs had demonstrated that the French were serious about it, and few were prepared to assist them by staging diversionary insurrections. The following weeks had seen the enrollment of Bristol's Volunteer Cavalry, the formation of a new Loyal Military Association and a new corps of Volunteer infantry, a loyal declaration from the staff at the theatre, and a number of minor alarms, panics and rumours that the French had been seen off the Somerset coast, were engaging British shipping in the Channel, or had actually landed in England[6].

> However different (Bristolians) opinions may have been respecting the propriety of the war and the conduct of the Administration, there appears to be

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5. HO 42/40 Coastal defence Memorandum dated January 1797; Vlaeminke, op cit., pp.151-2
6. See for example, Bonner and Middleton's Bristol Journal 11/2/1797, and 25/2/1797 for the flavour of local fear and obsession at this time.

no difference in the grand object of repelling the French foe[7],

commented the Gazette with some satisfaction. And when news of Tate's landing reached Bristol,

> Instead of alarm, fear or despondency appearing in our streets, they were crowded by tens of thousands of people, all burning with the utmost zeal and impatience to face the common enemy.

We may doubt the absence of alarm and fear, and we know very well that one common first-reaction to the news, in Bristol as elsewhere, was a general withdrawal of life-savings from the banks, creating a serious run and no small measure of financial chaos. But we need not doubt the willingness of many people to resist invasion, or their gathering on the streets in such large numbers to express that determination. At Bristol it was reported that many of the 'loyal peasantry' were pouring into the city, including a hundred from Rowberrow[8], twelve miles away, to offer assistance. 'The liveliest zeal pervades every Rank of persons without distinction', declared mayor Harvey[9].

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7. Bristol Gazette 22/2/1797
8. Rowberrow was a Mendip village much under the influence of Hannah More's loyalist Sunday School movement. They stood singing loyal songs outside the Exchange and received money from passers-by, Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 4/3/1797.
9. HO 42/40 Harvey to Portland 2/3/1797. For the financial panic see also a letter from the Bristol merchant John Pinney to his bankers in London, 2/3/1797, Pinney Papers, Bristol University Library Special Collection

This is not to say that Bristolians remained particularly calm and confident during the crisis, or convinced about the loyalty of all the people around them. Like the 'Anti-Gallican' who had 'heard it apprehended that many would join the French if they made a good landing', many people in the region spent those days in some anxiety[10]. Events during the morning of March 2nd were to prove how volatile the situation was when, to the beating of muster drums, news arrived in the city of a second French landing in Wales. Bristol's entire military compliment from the Thirteenth Foot to the Royal Bucks Militia and the Sussex Fencible Cavalry marched off to the quay for embarkation across the Channel. Civilians waved their hats, shouted encouragement and pulled money from their pockets to press on the soldiers; according to one estimate, about £100 was raised. The departure of the military had left the French POWs at Stapleton unguarded, so the Bristol Volunteers marched to the prison with shouldered pikes. 'The confusion created here was almost unprecedented'[11], reported on local paper, but the fact that it had all been for another false alarm was not discovered until later that evening.

With Napoleon's invasion army on permanent stand-by along the French coast from the Autumn of 1797, false alarms and apprehensions continued into the Spring. Thomas

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10. Bonner & Middleton's Bristol Journal 25/2/1797.
11. Bonner & Middleton's Bristol Journal 4/3/1793.

Jolliffe, the squire of Ammerdown, serving in the Somerset militia at Dunster, noted the unease around him:

> The good folks on the banks of the Severn are in great alarm from expecting a visit of the French, which is very likely to be soon[12].

Fear of invasion caused many eyes to stare anxiously out to sea in 1798, and the sighting of any vessel, French or English, could signal the escalation of panic. Government-inspired public subscriptions were launched in most British towns to offset the escalating cost of home defence. Terrified of invasion, people gave what they could afford, and perhaps rather more. By the end of February 1798, £11,000 had been raised at Bath alone; not only out of the pockets of the wealthy, but from the city's benefit clubs as well. The Amicable Benefit Club declared they would 'assist to the utmost of their abilities' to resist any invasion attempt, and the Loyal Society of Chairmen announced:

> In case of alarm on the coasts, we will crowd round the mayor of Bath or the county magistrates in order to preserve the peace and property of the worthy inhabitants from being broke in upon by dark assassins.

They called upon all societies to 'unite in sincere resolutions and make one general cause in opposition to anarchy, confusion and ruin' [13].

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12. Hylton Papers, SCRO DD/HY, Box 20, T S Jolliffe to M A Jolliffe (n.d. - 1798).
13. Bath Journal 19/2/1798; 26/2/1798. These 'Voluntary Contributions' were originally projected as an alternative and non-coercive way by which the rich

Yet still the region was woefully unprepared to repel an invading army. An official memorandum to the Duke of Portland in February found the Western military district the least adequately defended, despite the high probability (on past experience) of its selection as a target. The District was badly under-resourced and would need another 10,000 soldiers to make it secure[14]. Gradually, Britain's central and regional structures of authority co-operated to draw up a plan of defence that depended less on repelling the enemy and more on beating an effective and orderly retreat. In April, Somerset parish tythingmen and petty constables were ordered to compile lists of all able-bodied men and women, of those who would be 'incapable of removing themselves in case of danger', and of those who could not be relied upon for other reasons (including all 'Aliens and Quakers'). In May, they were ordered to compile lists of all local gamekeepers and wildfowlers, as these men 'might be of essential service in case of an actual invasion to act as sharpshooters and riflemen'. In June, parish overseers and clergymen were ordered to earmark assembly points for the withdrawal inland of livestock, and to appoint parish ditch-diggers (or 'Pioneers'). However, many parishes felt over-burdened by the constant demands being made of them. The problem was particularly acute in large centres

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might bear three-fold increases in the assessed taxes with better grace. Their 'voluntary' nature as far as the poor are concerned was discussed in chapter three.

14. HO 42/42, unsigned memorandum dated 17/2/1798.

of population where even the initial survey of persons was a major undertaking. On 16th June, The County Lieutenancy were moved to write to the subdivisions at Bath, Wells and Somerton

> expressing the surprise of the Lieutenancy and Magistracy at their giving no attention to the letters that have been sent them by their order, and that it is impossible to proceed in business of so much consequence without having the returns of their several subdivisions which they have so long neglected to do[15].

The Armed Forces and the People

However sincere common antipathy to a French invasion may have been, it was not matched by any enormous enthusiasm for military service. The government's escalating need for fresh recruits soon outstripped the availability of distressed weavers or other working men lured by bounties and security of employment. Large numbers of men did enlist, but their motives for doing were not always very patriotic. Coleridge saw joints of meat hung up over recruiting houses in Bristol during the scarcity of 1795, a strong enough enticement for a year in which most poor families could afford no meat at all. 'The people starved into war', was his comment[16]. It was the promotion of

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15. Minutebook of the Somerset County Lieutenancy and Magistracy 1798 - 1805, SCRO DD/CN Box 47/1.
16. K Coburn (ed), Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 1, 1794-1804 (New York 1957), col.42 G.34.

bullish nationalism, not simple patriotism that prompted the Bath Herald to portray the 'alacrity' with which the city's naval quota had been filled in 1796 as proof that

> The bounty that is offered is not half so great an inducement amongst these spirited lads as the hope of soon filling their pockets with Spanish dollars.

The spirited lads themselves remained unconvinced; one third of them had deserted with the bounty money within a fortnight[17]. Recruiting parties for the regular army found themselves competing with the fencibles, militia, and from the end of 1796 the supplementary and provisional cavalry militias, in a declining market of willing volunteers. County quotas, imposed in 1795 and 1796, only exacerbated ill-feeling between responsible parish authorities, already burdened with militia balloting, and the War Office[18].

Recruiting parties had never, of course, been popular within the poorer sections of society on which they preyed, and the legality of their activities were a frequent cause of friction. In 1795, Stephen Frampton of Salisbury indicted a recruiting sergeant for assault after being accosted at an inn, beaten, dragged to another inn and forced to enlist[19]. Local authorities were not unaware of the problem. Thomas Horner of Mells

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17. Bath Herald 10/12/1796 & 24/12/1796.
18. See Clive Emsley, British Society and the French Wars 1793-1815 (London 1979), pp.35-38 & 53.
19. WRO A3/110/38, Salisbury Borough QS rolls, February 1796, information of Stephen Frampton.

refused to help officers of the sixth regiment to secure an absconded new recruit at Frome in 1794, because

> in the recruiting service, as a magistrate, I am not unfrequently placed in an unpleasant situation by the improper conduct of the sergeant or corporal - They often act injudicious if not illegal[20].

A recruiting party of the Ninth Dragoons was 'almost beat to death' by a hostile crowd at Bath Race-course in 1795[21] and a similar battle took place a few days later at North Petherton Fair[22]. The Bath magistrates pressed the War Office for the Ninth's removal but were rebuffed. Then, days later, a party from the same regiment ambushed a Bath civilian in the street and battered him to death, evidently by way of revenge[23]. In 1800, seven men from the 5th Dragoons, an Irish regiment, surrounded a Bath linen draper one night in Westgate Street, clubbed him to the ground and beat him so savagely that his life was 'despaired of'. A reward was put up for a conviction and a sergeant court-martialled and reduced to the ranks shortly afterwards[24]. Recruitment was no easier during

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20. T Horner to Major Fitter, 6/5/1794, Mells Manor Muniments, Mells Park.
21. WO1/1083, Poyntz to Yonge 5/5/1795. As outsiders in the community, billetted troops aroused resentment for breaches of acceptable custom like stealing provisions for re-sale not at the 'moral' price, but for a profit. Two privates in the 18th Light Dragoons were prosecuted for doing this at Wincanton in 1795. See SCRO Q/SR 363/2, Easter sessions 1795.
22. Courier & Evening Gazette 15/5/1795.
23. WO1/1083, P George to Yonge 12/5/1795; and Courier 30/5/1795.
24. Bath Journal 5/5/1800.

the critical months of the 1803 invasion scare. A pitched battle in the streets of Bristol in that year between women-led crowds and a Navy Press Gang left a young boy dead and three women with gunshot wounds[25].

With most regular units liable to posting in Flanders or the West Indies, the militia and fencible regiments were left to guard the home coasts and quell outbreaks of domestic disorder. Few local communities or loyal innkeepers welcomed the billeting of military outsiders amongst them however. Soldiers were regarded as lawless, violent, prone to heavy drinking, and a drain upon provisions - particularly in localities where scarcity provoked disturbances and the arrival of further troops as a consequence. Local authorities often complained to the War Office about over-billeting, and occasionally took matters into their own hands. In January 1795, men from the 7th Dragoons returned to Westbury after a brief absence only to be refused access to their billets by the Constable, who told them they would be re-housed in scattered outlying villages. Fearing that this would make mustering and discipline virtually impossible, and seriously hamper the troop's effectiveness as an agency of social control, their officers complained at once to the War Office. At nearby Warminster a few weeks later, another Constable rebelled when officers of the incoming 12th Regiment demanded fifty more billets than he felt able to supply. This dispute was quickly solved, although

25. Bath Journal 4/4/1803.

at the further expense of community relations, when the Quarter Master threatened to

> march the men which was then at the door to the number of about fifty into my (the constable's) house and should pull it down. The men answered, 'We are the lads for it'[26].

Although friction between civilians and soldiers at Bristol was ameliorated in 1795[27], many local authorities were reluctant to act against unruly soldiers for fear of the consequences. When magistrates at Salisbury convicted two men from the 13th dragoons of burglary in the city during the summer of 1795, the rest of the troop responded by marching to Fisherton gaol and trying to force their release. The Salisbury Journal found their stay in the city 'extremely licentious and wantonly brutal' from start to finish, and their eventual removal following further complaints about their behaviour, was the catalyst for more trouble. Forced to leave their two burgling comrades behind, the men

> threatened to take ample vengeance... frequently drew their swords on persons unarmed, and at different times barbarously wounded three men, now patients in the infirmary.

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26. WO1/1089, G King to Lewis 23/1/1795; and WO1/1090, J Morgan to Wyndham, 5/3/1795. For the background to Militia/host community friction, and its escalation in 1795, see Roger Wells, 'The Militia Mutinies of 1795', in John Rule (ed), Outside the Law: Studies in Crime and Order 1650-1850, (Exeter 1982), P.39-41.
27. WO1/1092, Rooke to Wyndham 23/3/1795.

Their officers, apparently unable to control the troop's behaviour, could offer no better solution than to order the men to leave a day earlier than expected and so prevent any final plans for carnage they may have had in contemplation[28].

Soldiers billeted at Marlborough in 1795 were seen openly poaching on the Savernake estate by a local publican, but,

> He cannot tell who the men are, nor to what corps they belong, and he hopes it will not be known that he has given the information, as he shall be murdered if it is known.

The gamekeepers

> durst not face them, having heard it reported that the soldiers have said they... should not mind shooting a keeper no more than a rabbit or a buck... The keepers are not equal to facing men armed with muskets and bayonets[29].

Local conflict and mutual hostility of this kind created problems for the use of soldiers as a disciplined police force. Additional problems were posed by fears that regular recruits or balloted militia men might side with the crowd during provision disturbances, or worst of all become susceptible to radical ideology. Military recruits, especially to the balloted militia, were drawn from the very classes most likely to create disturbances.

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28. Salisbury Journal 24/8/1795.
29. Savernake Estate Papers 1300/2369, Ward to Ailsbury 7/1/1795, Wiltshire County Record Office.

Their reliability was therefore never entirely predictable, as Walter Shelton found in his study of food-rioting during the earlier scarcity of 1766, and the authorities at Bristol were to find in 1795 when militia men were accused of leading rioters[30]. An anonymous note sent to the mayor of Bristol that year claimed that unless prices were lowered at once, the people would arm and 'we have also three regiments of soldiers on our side which at three days notice will join us[31]'. It may well have been pure fantasy, but it nourished the fears of the authorities.

Particular doubts were harboured about the loyalism of Irish soldiers serving in England. Irish regiments were often given temporary billets at Bristol whilst awaiting embarkation by ship to new postings in Britain or to return home. Seven companies of recruits who mutinied at Pill over the alleged non-payment of bounties in 1795 belonged to the First Irish Fencibles. In the aftermath,

30. W J Shelton, English Hunger and Industrial Disorders A Study of Social Conflict During the First Decade of George III's Reign, (London 1973), pp.132-4. For a local study confirming magistrates fears that militia men helped organise the 1766 disturbances, see Adrian Randall, thesis op cit., pp.155-6. For Bristol see The Courier, 11/6/1795. This version of events, which also appeared in the opposition Evening Chronicle and Gazette, is not confirmed in local accounts however, and was vigorously denied by the militia officers. The publisher of the Chronicle was subsequently sued for libel over the report: TS11/944, King vs. John Vint, after it came to the attention of the Prime Minister: Chatham Mss 30/8/140, Grenville to Pitt 31/5/1795, Public Record Office.
31. Town Clerk's Letter Boxes, 1795 Box, Bundle 42, anon to mayor of Bristol 31/10/1795, Bristol City Record Office.

Rooke, pressed the War Office to hasten the movements of Irish soldiers in or out of Bristol:

> Although I sent 40 discharged men on Wednesday to Ireland, 20 others are since come which I beg I may have an order to put on board a transport to any port in Ireland, as by repeating their situations and distresses to the common people here, I fear may produce a riot as I assure you I find the mob of this city too much inclined to[32].

Men from another Irish regiment, the 122nd Loyal Wicklow Rangers quartered at Wells, went into the market place with fixed bayonets and forcibly regulated the price of butter. 'Encouraged by the lower class of people', the men announced further excursions 'into the neighbouring villages to the mills etc., and to set the price of other provisions'[33]. The War Office ordered the 122nd's removal from Wells but they caused more trouble on their march south, despite being split into two divisions for greater manageability. At Bruton, the Commander of the only company of Yeomanry for miles around encountered one division shortly after he had restored order at a civilian marketplace dispute by arresting a rioter and committing her to Ilchester gaol:

> they publicly declared had they come a few minutes earlier, they would have rescued the person at any

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32. WO1/1092 Rooke to Lewis 19/7/1795; Bath Journal 20/7/1795.
33. HO42/34 John Turner to Portland, 28/4/1795. The 122nd had arrived at Pill from Ireland in January and were ordered straight to Wells by Rooke. See WO1/1085, Lt Demenzie to Yonge, 3/2/1795.

risque. The other Division, which halted at Cary, openly declared also, on hearing there was a riot, they were ready to join any who would go with them. I was obliged to order an escort of Yeomanry to attend the chaise with the rioters till they got to such a distance as not to be overtaken by the Infantry[34].

In October, he was still worrying about Irish regiments, and the danger of sympathetic fraternisation with the English poor. He urged

> the quartering of the Irish regiments, particularly the new raised, as far distant as feasible from those districts where large bodies of men may be easily collected - colliers, miners, manufacturers etc[35].

Captain Craufurd had feared that Jacobin interference with his men at Trowbridge and Bradford might incite them to mutiny[36]. With such a possibility in mind, United activists styling themselves 'Your Bretheren in Arms' left leaflets calling on the troops to follow the example of the Nore mutineers at a number of barracks, including Bristol, in 1797[37]. If there was any accuracy in Captain

34. WO1/1093 Stevens to Yonge, 1/10/1795.
35. ibid.
36. HO 42/24, Craufurd to Dundas, 22/1/1793
37. One of these notes, distributed at Chelmsford, is preserved in PC1/3117 pt.1. The complete text ran: Success to the brave tars at Portsmouth. Soldiers! Assert your rights: Be no longer slaves: From your Bretheren in Arms. Other, longer missives drew attention to the soldiers' presumed 'grievances', from conditions of tyrranic slavery to low pay. If the published broadside response of the Royal Bucks

Wilmott's verdict on the quality of the men joining up at Bristol in 1794, the United's efforts were not entirely hopeless. Dismayed to find he could subsequently muster only twenty-eight of the fifty men he had recruited, Wilmott considered even these in

> such a turbulent, rioting, mutinous state, up to every Jacobin principle, which compelled me to dispose of them to the Bristol regiment - or I do suppose the rascals would near all have deserted, being determined against going to Chatham.

Wilmott abandoned Bristol entirely after that and headed off to South Wales where he believed he might more easily make up his compliment[38]. A note signed by District Military Commander Rooke's 'brother soldiers' in 1801 threatened that if prices were not lowered, they would throw down their arms, hang hoarding farmers, and fight for a republic; 'Let the mob do as they please, we will not interfere'[39]. There is certainly evidence that some soldiers in the South West harboured radical sympathies. James Tally, convicted for seditious expressions and inciting desertion at Shepton Mallet in 1796, boasted that he had enlisted and been discharged by faking wounds

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Militia at Bristol was anything to go by however, the campaign was not a success. The officers and NCOs all put their names to a declaration that they would seek out those who distributed the leaflets 'and that should we meet with any such wicked wretches, we will deliver them over to the magistrates': An Answer to the Infamous Handbill which was read by Lt Gen Rooke to the Troops under his Command at Bristol, reproduced in Broadley & Wheeler, Napoleon & The Invasion of England, The Great Terror, (London 1908), pp.204-5.

38. WO1/1081, W C Wilmott to Lewis, 5/7/1794.
39. HO42/61, Cowell to Portland 17/3/1801.

or illness no fewer than sixteen times[40]. Two deserters who were apprehended at Bath in 1794 over-powered the turnkey at the city gaol and made good their escape, but not before releasing two more deserters one other prisoner from confinement - Thomas Wylde, who had been convicted of seditious speech a few weeks earlier[41].

Volunteering

The revival of Volunteering in the 1790s was certainly inspired to a degree by the desirability of creating an armed internal police force composed of men with a presumed in-built antagonism towards plebeian disorder. Co-opting the emergent urban bourgeoisie into the armoury of the civil power was therefore a perfectly logical idea. As the Bath Herald put it in 1800 when patrols by the city Volunteers were augmented briefly by a specially recruited body of constables from the propertied classes,

> The safety of the place is now entrusted to the care of men who have large interests at stake, who by their property and credibility are the natural guardians of its peace[42].

Recent work by John Cookson and Austin Gee sheds much light on the role played by Volunteer enlistment in the

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40. SCRO Q/SR 364/3, Summer Quarter Session 1796, evidence of Thomas Troke and Thomas Gould.
41. Bath Herald 3/5/1794 and 7/6/1794.
42. Bath Herald 22/3/1800. And see the entries in the back of the Bath RA Minutebook for identities of the enrolled constables.

political empowerment of the urban bourgeoisie. 'The key point about Volunteering', writes Cookson, was that it armed the middle classes'. It was 'closely tied up with the concerns of urban elites and rulers and the growth of urban consciousness'[43]. In his eagerness to present the Volunteers as an attractive middle-class club, but with a genuine role to play in the resistance of invasion, Cookson rather underplays their dual purpose as policemen. Nevertheless, he has prepared the way for a re-examination of Volunteering based on precepts other than the purely patriotic; and which recognises that once Volunteering became a truly mass movement, the fear of conflicting social/economic or 'class' interests persuaded the government that the experiment was dangerous and should be curtailed.

Austin Gee has gone further in laying the 'loyalist' ghost. In his view, Volunteering was characterised not by armed Reevesism, but by a sense of patriotism that was politically non-partisan and concerned primarily with the defence of the Constitution against foreign imperial ambition. Volunteers attracted reformers to their ranks, not only as a result of malicious infiltration, but because there was no real reason to exclude them[44]. The experience of the South West amplifies the evidence

43. J E Cookson, 'The English Volunteer Movement in the French Wars 1793-1815, Some Contexts', Historical Journal Vol 32, No.4 (1989), pp.868 & 874.
44. Austin Gee, The British Volunteer Movement, 1793-1807, (Ph.D thesis, Oxford 1989). This approach is outlined with great clarity in the Abstract, pp.ii & iii.

offered by Cookson and Gee. As with Reevesism, we should consider not just the numbers of people who expressed support, but their motivation for doing so. We have already seen how the secretary of the Bath RA used his newspaper to congratulate employers who forced Volunteer enlistment on their workers. We also know that Thomas Horner, chairman of the Frome RA, squire at Mells, and a colonel in the North Somerset Volunteer Cavalry, compelled all his tenant farmers to enlist and serve under his command[45]. But many men were subjected to less stringent forms of inducement. Enlistment in the Volunteers carried with it an exemption from service in the militia - a better equipped and surely more useful military organisation for any man to join if he was genuinely interested in home defence. Yet the militia ballot could be, and often was evaded by anyone wealthy enough to provide a substitute. There were social reasons for this reluctance to serve on equal terms with social inferiors, as well as economic reasons (reluctance to be posted away from a place of business). As Captain Salmon of the Devizes Volunteers noted with some satisfaction in 1796:

> The apprehension of the new Militia Bill has contributed much to my troop of Yeomanry and I have now on my roll fifty five names and an offer of some more[46].

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45. Noted in the memoirs of Richard White, tenant farmer, and quoted in Cleverdon, A History of Mells, (n.d.), p.45.
46. Papers of the Wiltshire Yeomanry 1794-1805, WRO 84/40, W Salmon to ?, 1/11/1796.

By 1798, Henry Dundas, Secretary of State for War, was conscious that the country's militia was badly understaffed 'in consequence of the zeal of the Volunteer Corps'[47]. Additional attractions of volunteer enrollment included exemptions from horse tax or compulsory enlistment under the 1797 Provisional Cavalry Act, and the hair powder tax[48].

But men not snared by perks like these or enforcement by employers would find social pressure a heavy enough inducement. With every branch of the media constantly reminding John Bull that enrollment was the only way to 'display to his fellow countrymen the spirit of an Englishman', the invasion scare of 1803 met with an impressive response. The poet Robert Southey believed 'all Bristol is up in arms and volunteering - cool sport for the dog days!'[49] Cool sport, indeed. Men who failed to enlist were threatened with lasting social prejudice:

> Every Englishman is now called upon to make his election - to show whether he deserves the blessings of freedom and a government of justice and love -

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47. Quoted in W G Fisher, History of the Somerset Yeomanry, Volunteer and Territorial Units, (Taunton 1924), p.12.
48. H Graham, Annals of the Yeomanry Cavalry of Wiltshire, (Liverpool 1886), pp.11-12.
49. Volume of Notices relating to the Bristol Volunteers 1797-1810, Bristol Public Library; and Wheeler and Broadley, Napoleon and the Invasion of England: The Great Terror (London 1908), pp.345-6.

> whether his name shall be for a distinction and praise, or for a future mockery and reproach[50].

Four years earlier, the Bristol Gazette had carried the story of Thomas Parnell, a recruit who was dismissed for repeatedly broadcasting

> that he never considered himself a volunteer, not having enrolled himself to serve his King and Country but for the purpose of bringing custom to his shop.

Parnell denied being quite so cynical but admitted he had only joined 'at the solicitation of others' under considerable social pressure, and reaffirmed that he did not consider himself a 'Volunteer'[51]. Southey, who was by no means Reevesite in his loyalism and had shared Coleridge's enthusiasm for pantisocracy in the mid-1790s, considered Volunteering

> a system more favourable to the morals and security and liberties of the country than that of militias and standing armies[52].

It was not ministerialism and francophobia that appealed to commentators like Southey, but the idea that here was an institution that upheld the right of freeborn Englishmen independently to bear arms in defence of the Constitution. It was not, indeed, necessarily an impulse so far removed from that which enticed some men into the ranks of the United movement. In this context, George

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50. Arm, Arm ye Brave! or a Serious Address to the People of England by a Lover of his King and Country (Bath 1803).
51. Bristol Gazette 13/6/1799; 20/6/1799.
52. Broadley and Wheeler, op cit., pp.345-6

Wilkinson's enrollment into the Bath Volunteers is less perplexing. Some men joined to resist Napoleonic expansionism but were scarcely any more friendly toward their own government. As one recruit put it:

> To defend our country against the common enemy is now the only measure left us (but) it will be found, if the popular sense be anywhere <u>fairly</u> taken, that at this day the people of England desire the removal of the present ministry and would strenuously refuse sanction to their destructive system of measures[53].

With inducements to join the Volunteers, especially in 1803, so heavily applied, the acquiescent response of the British people is not surprising. Voluminous muster-rolls do not prove a readiness to fight the French or even to attend parade. One must be wary of confusing Volunteering with the expression of mass-Reevesite loyalism and of the sometimes over-enthusiastic language employed by the movement's supporters to demonstrate its popularity. Despite encouraging reports in most of the Bristol papers when the city's Volunteers were first enrolled in 1794, a correspondent for the <u>Courier</u> remained unconvinced:

> Our Bristol Volunteer Regiment fills but slowly. Peace is more universally desired and wished than expressed here, but those who dare speak their sentiments say it is better than war[54].

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53. <u>Bristol Mercury</u>, letter signed 'A Volunteer', 20/2/1797.
54. <u>Courier</u>, 29/7/1794.

Even in 1803, when Napoleonic invasion seemed most likely and the newspapers were packed with copy about floods of zealously patriotic recruits in every English village, Lord Pembroke was privately disappointed and uneasy. In truth, he was finding it difficult to fill Wiltshire's quota of men and wrote frequently to his C.O.s asking them to promote the advantages of Militia exemption more vigorously. He did not ask them to promote patriotism. To his friend the Earl of Caernavon he wrote:

> The papers are full occasionally of our vast preparations for defence, but the proof seems everywhere wanting... In this District, the Commander of it complains of the total want of means of defending it... As for the Volunteers, they are not half collected, half armed or at all trained for service. In short... I do not like the state we are in[55].

Despite Pembroke's misgivings however, Volunteer mobilisation in 1803 was generally impressive and the dynamics of mobilisation may require some explanation. The Bath Journal's approach is interesting. The first few inches of editorial space it offered to the invasion crisis in June of that year were not a call to arms in defence of the motherland, but a reminder of the 'allowances and exceptions' which awaited gentlemen who enrolled for the Volunteer Cavalry[56]. The major advantage, militia ballot exemption, was meanwhile

55. Wilton Estate Papers WRO 2057/F4/15, Lord Pembroke's Letter Book 1803, copy of letter dated 11/10/1803.
56. Bath Journal 27/6/1803.

enhanced by a new Act which raised the penalty for failure to provide a substitute by 50%. The government's threat of a levee en masse if Volunteering met with a poor response was spelled out in warning tones by the Journal:

> All persons from 15 - 45 who are not enrolled and disciplined in the Volunteer corps are liable to be called out every Sunday to the drill and in case an enemy appears on the coast, to be immediately marched to any part of the kingdom and drafted into the regular regiments[57].

The Journal reflected a popular dislike of coercive militarism. Not only were all able-bodied men now required by law to state the level of their preparedness to take up arms in case of invasion, but they were threatened with forcible enlistment into the regular army - a particularly unappetizing prospect to many of the status-conscious middle orders. Those who refused to co-operate with parish authorities by declaring an intention, the Journal reminded its readers, would forfeit all rights of indemnity for their property[58].

The virtue of Volunteering was that it safeguarded a high degree of independence for recruits, and preserved the abstract consensus values of liberty and freedom against the indiscriminate roulette of militia ballots. Although most corps were by this time subjected to conditions of

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57. Bath Journal 15/8/1803.
58. Bath Journal 8/8/1803.

service which removed their right to serve only in their own localities, independence and egalitarian discipline were still unpromising components of military efficiency, and enthusiasm for Volunteering hardly seems sufficient evidence of mass francophobic belligerence on its own. The Journal's disapproval of the impress service was implicit in the language with which it reported its activities at Bath in July, and the low esteem in which it held any regular military service may be inferred from its suggestion that England's armed forces be used as depositories for beggars, vagrants and criminals so that Bath's streets might be de-vulgarised. This was not the journalism of heroic patriotism. The Journal, and perhaps the great majority of its readers, were far more comfortable with the principles of Volunteering than with the harsh realities of effectively resisting the French.

That large bodies of men agreed to enrol themselves is not disputed. The Bath Volunteers publicly declared they had not done so simply to avoid the levee, but their protests are unconvincing. Men in secure employment, like the canal-diggers who formed their own corps at Combe Hay[59], accepted the occasional training days imposed upon Volunteers rather than risk economic dislocation and possible posting to the coast through balloting. Volunteers were obliged to march away from home only in the event of actual invasion and to attend drill only

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59. Bath Journal 8/8/1803.

eight times in every four months[60]. Volunteering was certainly about national unity and uniformity, but the great paradox of uniformity in this context was that the donning of a uniform served to raise the Volunteer above the drab anonymity of everyday life. Many Volunteer uniforms were so stylish, ornate and expensive that public subscriptions had to be raised to offset their cost. Members missed few opportunities in 1803 to display their peacock plumage before large crowds of admirers. With its busy social calendar of public field-days, colour-ceremonies, inspections and parades, Volunteering may have been something of a charade, but it was undeniably picturesque. The theatre of drilling drew such attention from the unenrolled public in 1803 that John Skinner, rector of Camerton, found it impossible to summon his parish to a public meeting for the important and serious business of explaining government's plans for the district's resistance to the French, because 'there happened to be a field day for the Volunteers at the same time (and) only three of the parishioners attended'[61].

In practice, the Volunteers were ill-equipped both materially and spiritually for the repulsion of the French. Men rushed to enlist, only to exhibit a woeful lack of interest in basic military training within a few months of enrolment. Initially, the unattractive

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60. Bath Journal 29/8/1803.
61. H Coombs and A N Box (eds), The Journal of a Somersetshire Rector, Rev John Skinner (London 1930), pp.10-11.

prospect of drilling threatened to sabotage recruitment altogether in some towns. Captain Wyndham had to 'promise three hours of drill weekly only' at Salisbury, and even that package had to be presented with an assurance that 'the convenience of the members shall be studied'. Musters of the Devizes Volunteers frequently had to be cancelled when insufficient men turned out. There are no entries in the Order Book between April 1800 and March 1801 - eleven months in which the whole country, and particularly the South West, was convulsed by public disorder[62]. At Bristol. Col. Evan Baillie and Lt General Rooke were 'extremely mortified' in 1800 by 'the remissness and inattention to parade duty' exhibited by their men. Baillie did his best after that to 'save the gentlemen as much as possible from being exposed in this damp and inclement season'. One Bristol officer attempted to shift the blame for the rising tide of resignations and non-attendance onto the efforts of 'the disaffected of this kingdom'. Radicals, he claimed, were trying to convince Volunteers that by aiding the civil power during market place disturbances, they were giving tacit 'support for monopoly... They have made too much impression'. Of course, Volunteers were as likely as anyone else to resent spiralling prices, and to harbour suspicions against monopolising farmers and corn-dealers for exacerbating them. Volunteers may often have found it difficult to uphold the law against 'moral economy'

62. H Graham, op cit., p.10; J Waylen, History of the Ancient Borough of the Devizes (London & Devizes 1859), p.593.

price-setting if they believed that the real villains were continuing to monopolise with impunity, and they will hardly have needed to be reminded of this by 'the disaffected'. The Bristol officer went so far as to accuse the disaffected, not producers, of creating the scarcity through clandestine hoarding 'to create discontent', and so undermine Volunteer discipline and destroy the Military Associations[63]. Yet inertia amongst Bristol's Volunteers did not evaporate when the scarcity stopped. Four years later for example, the troop twice ignored the muster drum when called upon to help extinguish fires and protect damaged property[64].

The Frome Volunteers were not much better. The town's most recent chronicler records that they were so terrified of the Mendip colliers, that officers were 'advised' not to call them out during one threatened disturbance since 'half of them will not come out if they think there is any danger'[65]. A farmer from Taunton believed it 'impolitic' that the Volunteers should continue to exist during the trouble-prone month of April 1801:

> In the first place, can it be supposed they could divest themselves of all sensibility and point the bayonet against their nearest relatives? It is more than probable they would (or the great majority of

63. Felix Farley's Bristol Journal 11/10/1800.
64. Volume of Notices relating to the Bristol Volunteers 1797-1810, Bristol Public Library.
65. M McGarvie, The Book of Frome, (Buckingham 1980), p.111.

them) be prompted by the same opinion that madly and unthinkingly promoted the tumult, and in that case might, with their arms, do infinite destruction.

The law was not stringent enough to deal with the 'petulant resignations, disobedience and inattention' that characterised the Volunteers, and the writer blamed their predominantly urban or non-agricultural background for an in-built prejudice against farmers and the prices they set. He therefore counselled the disarming of the Volunteers, and an expansion of the farmer-led Yeomanry who, 'as possessed of property (or) under the control of their landlords' were the men most naturally fit for the job[66]. The solution would also require the better funding of the Yeomanry service however, for like the Volunteers, and despite their relative affluence, Yeomanry regiments were not all efficiently equipped. An officer of the Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry had cause to complain to his CO, Lord Bruce in 1796 that

> the cartridges and balls are too small for the bore of our pistols, as when we marched against some rioters in our neighbourhood, we found on our return that most of our charges had fallen into our holsters[67].

But even the Yeomanry could not always be relied upon, as an incident only a few miles away during the same month was to demonstrate. The commander of a troop of Yeomanry

66. HO42/61, Anonymous farmer to Portland 9/4/1801.
67. Savernake Estate Yeomanry Papers, 9, Wyndham to Bruce, n.d. (but in 1796 bundle), WRO.

was surrounded and intimidated crowd at Chard and held captive for two hours while his men remained 'inactive, looking on'. Far from being effectively opposed, this crowd were later joined by 'all the Volunteer Infantry of Combe St Nicholas' and only halted the following day by the arrival of regular troops[68].

Persistent refusal to attend drill or to pay the fines imposed for their negligence could lead to men being discharged as 'deserters' and their public exposure in the papers - a form of vilification previously used on Jacobins[69]. In the midst of the 1800 grain-crisis, the effective force of the Heytesbury Volunteers was shattered by the necessity of substantial numbers of men taking to the fields, 'the men having had no practice during the hay and corn harvest'. Some resigned permanently. Their C.O. entreated the Lord Lieutenant to cancel a proposed parade of inspection because the men were insufficiently advanced in 'military discipline'[70]. 'Effectiveness' acquired a more precise definition in 1804 under legislation designed to limit the democratic drift of the Volunteers whilst easing resignations and

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68. HO42/61, ? to Portland 1/4/1801 (signature and last quarter of letter missing).
69. Examples may be found in Sherborne Mercury 27/1/1800; Records of the Marlborough Armed Volunteer Association, (August 1800), Wiltshire County Record Office; or in J Waylen op cit., pp.591-3. In Marlborough, the names of 'deserters' were also pinned up in the Market place together with a recommendation that they be 'sent to Coventry'.
70. Papers of the Heytesbury Volunteers, WRO 72/1-8, J G Everett to Earl of Pembroke 6/10/1800.

withdrawing privileges from the 'ineffective'. 'Ineffective' Volunteers were men who had attended less than 24 training days in 12 months (or 114 days in the case of the cavalry)[71]. Absenteeism by this time was endemic at Bath where the officers of the Volunteer Cavalry feared the new Act would herald wholesale resignations. A public meeting resolved to counter-attack the apathetic by publishing the names of all resignees in the press 'unless the resignation shall be considered perfectly satisfactory to the Commanding Officer'[72]. At Wells where absenteeism was punishable by a thirty guinea fine, resignations had caused major disruptions to the 'disgrace' of the corps even during the 1803 period of so-called 'mass Volunteering'[73].

Volunteer regiments could be fiercely independent and worryingly democratic in their insistence on organisation by committee. The very first decision made by the Committee of the Chippenham Armed Association after its formation in 1798 for instance was to confirm their exemption from military discipline and courts martial[74]. The opportunities offered by such a system for bourgeois self assertion caused frequent disciplinary problems to which there was no satisfactory solution other than suspension or dismissal.

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71. Fisher, op cit., p.14
72. Bath Chronicle 29/3/1804
73. Wells Volunteer Cavalry, The Committee Taking into Consideration the Disgrace that must Fall on the by Members at this Very Alarming Crisis Withdrawing Therefrom (Wells 1803).
74. Chippenham Scrapbook, WRO 2436/72.

The poorly equipped Yeovil Corps went on strike in 1803 because they considered carrying pikes instead of rifles beneath their dignity[75], and three companies of the Selwood Forest Legion were suspended by their commanding officer in 1804 after a 'very unpleasant and very unfortunate dispute'. The roots of this unpleasantness lay in an already well-established local jealousy felt by the Frome clothier and Volunteer captain William Sheppard for the Tory squire and Commanding Officer, Thomas Champneys. But it was expressed in Sheppard's wounded pride over Champneys' decision to give the Beckington company 'precedence' - in other words to designate it the First Company - over the three Frome Companies. When the Lord Lieutenant intervened and suggested that lots should be drawn for the distinction, Champneys angrily refused and Sheppard is alleged to have retorted that, in that case, 'his Company should fight for it'. The possibility, confessed Poulett, 'induced me to desire that Arms might not be delivered to the Frome Companies'. This petty and conceited squabble could not be resolved without winding up the entire Corps and re-allocating the Frome Companies, a 'solution' which can have done nothing to inspire public confidence in the Volunteer system in what

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75. HO 50/86, Lt Col Fane to Lord Poulett, 12/11/1803; and Sir Mathew Nathan, Annals of West Coker (Cambridge 1957), p.448. The government were at this time doing their best to supply muskets as a replacement for pikes amongst all Volunteer corps, but this was not achieved in Somerset until 1804.

the aggrieved Frome officers readily admitted was 'a manufacturing country subject to disturbance'[76].

One Devizes Volunteer 'refused to attend any more because he had been placed on the piquet'[77]. In 1798, the Wiltshire Yeomanry became so petulant when the King passed by in his coach without inspecting them that 'it seems very nearly to have resulted in the resignation of the whole of the members'[78]. An opinion from Bristol that the Military Association was characterised by 'a desire of obtaining the name of soldiers without experiencing the trouble and danger necessary to deserve it' was harsh, but not altogether inaccurate[79].

The discovery and dismissal of George Wilkinson from the Bath Volunteers highlighted the laxity of vetting procedures. The authorities became concerned not only that men like Wilkinson were joining the volunteers, but that they might be selected as officers. In Wiltshire, Lord Pembroke urged his divisional commanders to veto the appointments of any 'suspected characters' and to try to ensure that commissions went to 'gentlemen of property in the neighbourhood':

> If there are not many of that description, I should advise that the Corps be divided into three

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76. HO 50/119, Lt Col T Champneys to Wyndham, letters of various dates 1803-4.
77. Waylen, op cit., p.591.
78. Graham, op cit., pp.22-4.
79. Peter Pickle, To The Mock Volunteers or Bristol Heroes (Bristol 1794).

companies only of 100 men each; and even if proper persons for the command were in plenty, not to exceed four companies with two subalterns to each. If no gentlemen could be found a clergyman's son is, I think, preferable to all other descriptions of people in various lines of life[80].

Cookson and Gee both refute any suggestion that the Volunteers were more interested in destroying radicalism and social unrest at home than simply repelling invasion. In Cookson's view, the fact that invasion scares were always the motor for increasing enrollment, and an assertion that the Volunteers 'displayed no real counter-revolutionary initiative' are the over-riding considerations, despite occasional outbursts of Volunteer rhetoric about domestic policing[81]. It might be fairer to state that most Volunteer regiments displayed no real initiative for <u>any</u> kind of positive action except uniformed display. Their readiness to withdraw consent at the slightest inconvenience exposed a general unreliability that did not escape Britain's military planners. When Volunteers were first enrolled in 1794, most regiments understood their commitment in purely parochial terms. The Devizes troop for example, were 'not

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80. <u>Wilton Estate Papers WRO 2057/F4/15, Lord Pembroke's Letter Book 1803</u>, copies of letters to C W Coxe 20/9/1803 and G Norris 9/10/1803.
81. J Cookson, <u>op cit.</u>, p.871.

to march out of the county without their consent'[82]. In Somerset too, Lord Poulett was asked in 1794 to obtain government approval for a county-only Yeomanry to limit the harm that might otherwise be done to local agriculture. It was rightly thought that this would 'facilitate the raising of troops'[83]. Whilst it may be true that the formation of a Volunteer force freed militia units for service on the coast, this was a convenience that effectively confirmed the role of the Volunteers as armed policemen of the interior. During the enrollment of 1797-8, efforts were made to persuade troops to serve over a wider area. Some, like the Chippenham Volunteers, refused to venture further than four miles from the town boundaries[84].

Negotiations between the county authorities and the men tended towards the delicate and protracted. In March 1798, Henry Dundas asked the Earl of Pembroke, as Lord Lieutenant of Wiltshire, to inquire whether the Yeomanry

> would be willing <u>in the event of actual invasion or very imminent danger thereof</u> to extend their service generally <u>to the limits of the Military District</u> (that is, into parts of Hampshire and Dorset)

Pembroke passed his plea on to the C.O., Lord Bruce, with a suggestion that he ask the officers of the ten

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82. <u>Letters and Papers of the Wiltshire Volunteers and Yeomanry 1794-1805, WRO 84/40</u>, letter dated 4/6/1794,
83. Fisher, <u>op cit</u>., p.21.
84. <u>Chippenham Armed Association, WRO 2436/72</u>, declaration dated 2/5/1798. The Everley troop was another with the same attitude: Graham, <u>op cit.</u>, p.15.

troops to save time by 'anticipating the decision' of the men. This they were not prepared to do however, and insisted on obtaining 'the voluntary solicitation of our fellow soldiers' before making a decision. For the men of the Salisbury troop, it meant each of them signing a formal document of acceptance[85]. Even then the matter was not buried. Later that year, agreement was reached for moving the Marlborough Volunteers across the border into Berkshire. On being told he had to take his men to Maidenhead, the C.O., William Eyre could not comply because 'I conceive I am not authorised to act out of my county'. He offered to take them to the border, but no further. In any case, he reasoned, none of his sub-divisional commanders had replied to his circular asking them to procure waggons in which to transport the men[86].

Moral pundits railed against the selfish considerations of commerce over the defence of the nation as the inevitable Achilles Heel of any Volunteer movement led by the middling orders. This was particularly so at Bristol, where business traditions were at the heart of civic ceremony, and where unkind comparisons with the

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85. Letters and Papers of Wiltshire Volunteers and Yeomanry WRO 84/40, Pembroke to Bruce 15/3/1798, and other related documents.

86. Letters and Papers op cit., W Eyre to Brook Watson and W Eyre to Major Lindsay 30/9/1798. The compulsory procurement of waggons and carriages for transporting troops about the country was rarely a simple matter. The requisition of virtually 'all coaches, carriages, waggons and carts, public and private' for moving the militia out of Bath in 1799 nearly caused rioting. See Monthly Magazine, Sept 1799.

supposedly more refined and cultured neighbouring city of Bath had long saddled its citizens with Philistine attributes[87]. The anti-commercial sentiments of Robert Lovell's pantisocratic 'Bristol: A Satire', discussed in chapter two, were picked up by 'Peter Pickle' in another poem published that year, and attacking the city's Military Association:

> How could these Bristol Heroes travel far
> And leave their business for the toils of war?...
> Let Truth be umpire, she would answer No
> Such Loyalty as theirs is outward show.
> Some are by Trade prohibited to roam
> And wives and masters keep the rest at home[88].

As late as 1804, only half the Volunteers in the Capital had agreed to be moved during an emergency. Considering the problem in June, the Duke of York could only hope 'that all such limitations would be abandoned on the appearance of an enemy'. Yet, he reminded Lord Camden, 'I am not at liberty to rest the safety of the country upon any speculative opinion'[89].

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87. The issue is discussed and questioned by Elizabeth Baigent, Bristol Society in the Later Eighteenth Century with special reference to the handling by computer of fragmentary historical sources (Ph.D thesis, Oxford 1985), pp.42-54. See also Jonathan Barry, op cit., pp.300-10.
88. Robert Lovell, Bristol, A Satire (Bristol 1794); Peter Pickle, To The Mock Volunteers or Bristol Heroes (Bristol 1794).
89. Quoted in P J Haythornthwaite, 'The Volunteer Force 1803-4', Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research 64 (1986), pp.196-7. Haythornthwaite accepts that 'the differing terms of service under which the units were enlisted remained a permanent hazard in formulating defence strategy'.

Even where men were willing to take their defensive role seriously, pomposity and ceremonial self-aggrandisement often got the better of them. When the Frampton Volunteers expended their entire annual allowance of live ammunition during an elaborate public display marking Nelson's victory at the Nile, the Board of Ordnance told their C.O. he would receive no more until the following year. After considerable remonstrance, the government relented and were no doubt thankful the French chose not to sail up the Severn during the intervening months[90].

During the public order crisis of 1800, the Lord Lieutenant of Somerset sent a circular to all Volunteer commanders to remind them of their role as an adjunct to the civil power and assuring them that government had 'no reason to doubt of their readiest acquiescence'[91]. Nor should they, for despite Cookson's insistence that the Volunteers were formed during invasion scares as a last line of defence against the French, many of the Armed Associations of 1798 listed their priorities rather differently. The first article of the Chippenham Volunteers ran:

> The intent of this Association is for the preservation of Internal Tranquility and the

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90. J R S Whiting, 'The Frampton Volunteers', Gloucestershire Historical Studies, Vol 2, (n.d.), p.26.
91. Correspondence and Papers of the Taunton and Pitminster Volunteers, SCRO DD MT Box 18, Poulett to Capt Southwood 11/3/1800.

> Maintenance of a proper police within this parish and its immediate vicinity[92].

And the principle objective of the Frome Selwood Volunteers in 1797 was 'the suppression of riots', with resistance to invasion third on the list after guarding POWs[93].

One can be sceptical about the sincerity and strength of the loyalist impulse behind mass Volunteer mobilisations without necessarily rejecting the commitment to ministerial loyalism intended by the movement's organisers. Austin Gee takes most historians of the period to task for ascribing connections between the Volunteers and political loyalism, and contends that very few regiments had any direct links with Reeves Associations[94]. But this was certainly not the case at Bath where the Armed Volunteer Association of 1798 not only inherited several Committee members from the defunct RA, but also its Minute Book - giving at least the impression of continuity. To state, as Cookson does, that the Volunteers 'displayed no real counter-revolutionary initiative' is rather too simple an observation[95]. It is true that Volunteer regiments were only called out to maintain order, and that the old target of the RAs, the radical societies, were unlikely to cross their path after the passing of legislation banning meetings of more

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92. WRO 2436/72, op cit.
93. History of the North Somerset Yeomanry (n.d), p.6
94. Austin Gee, op cit., p.33.
95. J Cookson, op cit., p.871

than 50 people was passed in 1795. But in a less direct sense, the Volunteers could not raise themselves above political considerations. The major threat to public order during the later 1790s and in 1800-01 was the provision riot, and it was at incidents of this type that most Volunteers saw their only active service. Unsurprisingly, the radical thesis that domestic famine was the consequence of an unjust war found its widest acceptance whenever shortages became acute. The apparent politicisation of English crowds was more marked in 1800 than in 1795, but at all times the deployment of Volunteers to subdue hunger-related rioting involved an implied rejection of Opposition as unpatriotic, a forcible endorsement of the political status quo, and tacit support for Pitt's innovative laissez-faire infringements of the 'moral economy'.

Since the maintenance of good order and the quelling of domestic discontent was a vital component in any larger strategy to confound the French, the Volunteers' role in those English heartlands now inadequately policed by regular troops was an important departure for organised loyalism. Yet the reliability of the Volunteers in such a situation could never be guaranteed, even within the confines of their home counties. It was not just that Volunteers sometimes joined or even led moral economy crowds[96], but that they sometimes showed complete

96. John Bohstedt, Riots and Community Politics in England and Wales 1790-1810, (Harvard 1983), pp.224-8.

disinterest. George Donisthorpe, Captain of the Somerton Volunteers and a County magistrate, was successfully prosecuted at the Wells Assize in August 1796 for failing to prevent or quell a grain riot in the village the previous year[97]. After a grain riot went unchecked and unchallenged at Salisbury in 1800, the Everley troop were ordered into the city on the following market day to prevent a recurrence. But three principal officers ignored the muster (one of whom, a farmer, had been a victim of the mob a week earlier), leaving the troop in the hands of a sergeant major. He took them as far as Amesbury, where they drank so much they were unable to continue[98]. The County Lieutenant, Lord Pembroke, did his best to rally the various Wiltshire troops behind the civil power, but was warned by at least three C.O.s that their men seemed disaffected. In April, the Malmesbury troop 'declared a resolution to refuse that assistance in support of the public peace which every armed body is expected to afford'. Pembroke pressed his C.O.s to act diplomatically, 'set them right by a little explanatory conversation', and

> state to them the several advantages they will forgo if scratched off the Roster of the Company, such as the loss of weekly pay, exemption from the Militia Service etc, etc...

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97. Sherborne Mercury 8/8/1796, and Bath Herald 6/8/1796.
98. Waylen, op cit., pp.471-2; and John Belcham, 'Orator' Hunt: Henry Hunt and English Working Class Radicalism (Oxford 1985), p.20. (Hunt was a member of the troop until he resigned from it in 1797 because of their refusal to serve out of the County).

At all events however, they were to deal with the problem quickly and effectively for

> It would be highly dangerous to retain a body of people in the public service who are likely to use their Arms in assisting to disturb the public peace[99].

Peter Pickle's judgement was concise but perceptive:

> Up rose a band who were obscure before
> To drive the Frenchman from the British shore
> To quell the Jacobins and peace restore.
> Such the intent on which this Corps proceeds
> But Falstaff like, far more in words than deeds[100].

The intention of using the Volunteers as an organ of armed Property against internal discontent, whether it was discontent motivated by politics or hunger, was clear enough. But, like the RAs before them, they attracted 'support' from men entertaining a far wider spectrum of political opinion than was envisaged by military commanders or civic authorities. The architects of Reevesite loyalism may have supplied the rhetorical bluster behind Volunteer mobilisation, but they were able neither to control or sufficiently understand the genuine popular loyalism of some of the men who enlisted, nor yet the often conceited and ultimately uninterested 'loyal' displays of others.

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99. Wilton Estate Papers WRO 2057/F4/12. Lord Pembroke's Letter Book 1800, copies of letters to WB Brodie 17/3/1800, 26/3/1800, Wm Fowle 22/3/1800, and Creswall Estcourt 15/4/1800.
100. Peter Pickle, op cit.

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To expose Volunteer ineffectiveness is not to say that the mobilisation of a virtual consensus of popular hostility to Napoleonic expansionism never happened. Stella Cottrell has called the flurry of 'unifying' handbills, ballads and prints that accompanied the passage of the Militia Service Bill in 1803, 'the earliest attempt at recruitment of active popular support for government and war by means of 'mass' propaganda'[101], and it was certainly direct and unambiguous in its simple anti-gallican, pro-British liberty appeal for the mass resistance of invasion. As previously stated, few British subjects, whatever their opinion on reform, will have relished subjugation by a foreign empire which had long since abandoned civil egalitarianism as its guiding principle. It is nevertheless important for historians to recognise patriotic myth-making when it appears in front of them. If the 1790s saw the rapid development of the politics of inclusion and national consensus, the invasion scare of 1803 marked its culmination, but if the consensus loyalism of the RAs was, as I have argued, over-simplifying and ambiguous in the early 1790s, the mass popularity of Volunteering was no less mythical. It is interesting to compare past precedents.

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101. Stella Cottrell, 'The Devil on Two Sticks: Franco-phobia in 1803', R Samuel (ed), Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of the British National Identity, 1, History and Politics (London 1989), p.260.

In the summer of 1779 during the American war, the combined French and Spanish fleet dropped anchor within striking distance of the South West coast of England. Devonians waited for an invasion that never materialised, behind antiquated coastal batteries and a home defence policy which amounted to little more than scorching the earth. The Bristol methodist John Chubb was there:

> We expected the enemy would have landed and taken Plymouth Dock Yard and gone through our country. They continued in sight of our coast four days, we were directed if they landed, to set fire to our corn and drive our cattle away... Jesus, the Master of the Seas, took our cause in hand and drove them away from our land... What made our situation very alarming, our great fleet was not near our channel! The batteries on our coast in bad repair, but little ammunition and no English vessel could pass on account of the enemy[102].

Although several columns of Cornish tinners marched manfully to the sea to assist the British armed forces, the perceived closeness of invasion was not met with the sort of dramatic patriotic national unity in which contemporary commentators and historians have clothed popular resistance to the French attempts of 1797 and 1803. Five months later, the Bath Volunteers, far from enjoying the laudatory plaudits of the people were

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102. John Edwards (ed), The Bristol Journal of James Chubb (Bristol New Room 1988), p.11.

already being subjected to calls for their disbandment on a fairly regular basis. The Bath Chronicle championed them, but was not effusive in its praise: 'They may, in time of danger, be useful to their country and an honour to this city'[103], it supposed. Aside from the common belief in the utility of the constitution, mass political consensus was as elusive in 1797 or 1803 as it had been during the more openly divisive American war. The important difference is that it did not seem so.

In some respects, the myth of popular consensus during the 1790s was no less important to national survival than that fostered during the London 'Blitzkrieg' of 1940, or the shambolic withdrawal from Dunkirk, both of which have been recently examined in this context. The deliberate construction of mass consensus to unify resistance to Nazi invasion involved several features common to the experience of the 1790s, from voluntary contributions (Spitfire Funds) to inclusive language. Churchill's emphasis upon the war as one of 'causes' fought by 'all creeds, all classes... all peoples' and 'not only soldiers but the entire population, men, women and children', echoes the loyalist rhetoric of the 1790s and it had the same purpose - the creation of an impression of a common situation and common purpose. The defiant but cheerful suffering of indomitable cockneys under siege has become one of the most enduring national icons of the war against Hitler. Yet it obscured - and continues to

103. Bath Chronicle, 20/1/1780.

obscure - the entrenched class antagonisms that erupted over evacuation, the broad left Peoples Convention of 1941 with its strongly supported platform of opposition to both British and Nazi imperialism and the consequent government suppression of the Daily Worker, or the refusal of many fishing fleets to sail for Dunkirk to assist in the hazardous business of rescuing beleaguered British soldiers[104]. The 'myth of the Blitz' was the myth of national consensus - whether in 1940, 1797 or 1803 - and it was not exactly a lie. Rather, as Angus Calder puts it,

> Its construction involved putting together facts known or believed to be true, overlaying these with inspirational values and convincing rhetoric - and leaving out everything known to be factual which didn't fit[105].

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104. Angus Calder, The Myth of the Blitz (London 1991), pp.31-2, 51, 61-3, 85-9 and 96-8. See also N Harman, Dunkirk: The Necessary Myth (London 1981).
105. Angus Calder, op cit., p.43

Chapter Six

Liberty, Faith and Loyalism:
The Politics of Religious Schism

'Let us not be scared by the angry appellations, opprobriously cast upon us by certain interested bretheren, within the pale, of latitudinarians, innovators, reformers, perhaps of Jacobins, though nothing can be more opposite to our real character than the lovers of discord and confusion'.

(John Duncan[1])

This chapter considers two elements of eighteenth century religious controversy: relations between dissent and Reevesism and between reform and millenarianism. The role of the Established Church within the constitution of Crown, Lords and Commons is a matter for interpretative debate[2]. Technically, the Church's role was confined to a

1. John Duncan, An Appendix to Seasonable Hints to the Younger Part of the Clergy of the Church of England Relative to What are Misconceived to be Religious Controversies (Bath n.d.), P.12.
2. For J C D Clark's well known view that the centrality of the Church and its moral values within the Hanoverian state was the motor of social cohesion,

limited representation in the House of Lords, but it nevertheless wielded considerable secular influence as an arm of local government. As already noted, the clergy played a vital role in soliciting and collecting 'loyal' subscriptions on behalf of the government, but they also influenced local administration through vestry committees, and were asked to submit and comment upon crop returns and local diets to Whitehall during the 1800-01 scarcity. , . Anglican political conservatism was perfectly matched to Reevesism, but, as Paley's Reasons For Contentment demonstrated in 1793, somewhat out of step with the problems of dissenters: 'Religion smooths all inequalities, because it unfolds a prospect which makes all earthly distinctions nothing'[3]. Another Anglican tract had declared 'the generality of dissenters in religion are Innovators in Politics' in 1790 and it was assumptions like this that helped the Church and State establishment to repel dissenting assaults against the Test Acts by a much wider margin in parliament that year than in 1789[4]. The Church was therefore co-opted by Reevesism without difficulty. At Bath in 1795 for

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see his English Society, 1688-1832 (Cambridge 1985), pp.161-173. For a rather less partial view of the debate see David Hempton, 'Religion in British Society, 1740-1790', in Jeremy Black (ed), British Politics and Society from Walpole to Pitt, 1742-1789 (London 1990), pp.203-4.

3. Quoted by J C D Clark, English Society, 1688-1832: Ideology, Social Structure and Political Practice during the Ancien Regime (Cambridge 1985), p.262.
4. See N U Murray, The Influence of the French Revolution on the Church of England and its Rivals, 1789-1802 (Ph.D thesis, Oxford 1975), pp.20-22. The parliamentary debate on the Test Acts was lost by the dissenters by only 20 votes in 1789, but by 189 a year later.

example, the loyal address to the Crown after the mobbing of the King's coach was 'drawn up by a committee of the clergy and therefore much stronger than many thought necessary'[5]. Additional Reevesite loyal addresses emphasising the inseparability of Church and State were drawn up by the Bishops of Bath and Wells and of Salisbury, and circulated exclusively for the signatures of the Anglican clergy in each diocese[6]. The association of (Anglican) church and king rhetoric with the principles of Reevesism illustrated the effective limits of RA inclusivity by defining abstract theories of Liberty which disinherited dissenters. Government relied upon clerical influence once again during the post-Reevesite invasion crisis of 1803-4 when clergymen were not only entrusted with the compilation of lists of those able bodied civilians willing to resist a French invasion[7], but were also expected to coerce their parishioners into becoming Volunteers. Every adult male villager at Newton St Loe 'cheerfully enrolled his name' after their clergyman convened a meeting in the churchyard to 'explain' the necessity of it[8].

The forced marginalisation of radicalism meanwhile has been seen by some historians as a motivating force behind methodist revivalism and an upward surge of interest in

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5. Courier, 29/11/1795.
6. Bath Chronicle, 26/11/1795 & Salisbury Journal, 23/11/1795.
7. See the parochial returns for Wellow and Bath Forum in SCRO DD/RG 68-74.
8. Bath Journal, 29/8/1803.

millenarian belief[9]. John Baxter has tested these claims in the West Riding of Yorkshire by matching the chronology of radical decline with that of methodist revival. Although he found evidence of correlation, the question of motivation and of whether most of the new converts to methodism had previously been supporters of radicalism, remains unanswered[10].

Establishment, Dissent and Loyalism.

Coleridge's maxim that 'the very act of dissenting from established opinions must generate habits precursive to the love of freedom'[11], was undoubtedly true of a large number of dissenters and it is not difficult to understand the attraction felt by many towards the French Revolution in its opening months. By the end of the eighteenth century, campaigning dissenters had graduated from a desire to be left to worship without interference, to a desire to exercise constitutional civil privileges in common with the Anglican majority. The 'general reason' of dissent, it was asserted in 1777, was now

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9. For the classic statement of this view, see E P Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (London 1968), pp.419-29.
10. John Baxter, 'The Great Yorkshire Revival, 1792-6; A Study of Mass Revival Among the Methodists', Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain, 1974.
11. Quoted in The Watchman, no.1, March 1796.

'Intellectual Liberty'[12]. Men like Benjamin Hobhouse, who began by campaigning against the Test Acts and moved into the wider reform movement via abolitionism, acted very much as 'dissenting radicals'. The Revolution Society of 1788 was formed by dissenting members of the Society for Constitutional Information partly to give expression to the struggle against the Test Acts, and partly also in recognition of the civil or 'natural' rights bestowed by the Act of Settlement. At Bath in 1791 for example, the Revolution Society made clear its attachment to the Crown, Liberty, reform and 'the sacred rights of man'[13]. It is hardly surprising that Anglican Reevesites regarded them with such deep suspicion.

Many dissenters, in common with the secular radicals, took encouragement from the precedents set for reform by the early days of the French Revolution. The collapse of papal authority in France had ushered in the granting of a new legal status for French protestants and English dissenters were hopeful of the example being followed at home. It was not until the Revolution's tilt towards terror that many abandoned faith with it as an agent of the millenium of Liberty and came to see it from the common (Anglican-led) perspective as the embodiment of atheism and anti-christ[14].

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12. H T Dickinson, Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth Century Britain (London 1977), p.202.
13. Bath Chronicle 10/11/1791.
14 See R H Martin, Evangelicals United: Ecumenical Stirrings in Pre-Victorian Britain, 1795-1830, (London 1983), P.27-29.

It must not, of course, be assumed that all dissenters held common sympathies for abstract notions of reform as an agent of progress, even in 1789. The apparent connections between dissent (dissatisfaction with religious institutions) and radicalism (dissatisfaction with political institutions) were seized upon by the enemies of both to delineate precisely what it was that Church & King stood in resistance to. The point at which dissent and radicalism became relevant to one another was not necessarily in any meeting of minds over the desirability of reforming respective institutions however. Dissent after all does not automatically imply a wish to alter national religious practices, but to withdraw from them and seek alternatives. Toleration, not revolution was the watchword of many dissenters. By and large then, the connection between established Dissent (Baptists, Methodists, Quakers...) and popular reform societies was defined not by members of either, but by the defenders of Anglicanism against 'extra-constitutional' innovations. Religious schism, from the Anglican point of view, threatened the necessity of national cohesion.

The involvement of Hobhouse and other dissenters with the campaign against the Test Acts had brought accusations of Jacobinsim from a Bath loyalist in 1792 who considered their 'struggle' was 'likely to produce much mischief' in

the city[15]. When Bath's Unitarians opted not to assemble for worship on a national Fast Day in 1793, they were roundly condemned for 'disaffection and sedition... by the illiberal'. Their minister laid the blame at the door of 'clerical artifice', instigated by 'a set of men who have of late been particularly anxious to establish a character for loyalty'. He was affronted by the accusations, but not greatly surprised by them:

> At a time like the present, when mankind has been taught by various unprincipled manoeuvres to suspect and to calumniate each other, we may expect censoriousness and abuse to be the order of the day[16].

The absurdity of such a malicious misuse of the language of loyalism is graphically illustrated by the 'Blagdon controversy' of 1800-1801 in which loyalist High Church clerics openly and publicly equated Methodism with Jacobinism in order to vilify the influential Evangelical Anglican Hannah More (their staunch political ally) for theological unorthodoxy. The curate of Blagdon, Thomas Bere, tried to force the closure of one of Hannah More's Sunday Schools on the grounds that a methodist master had introduced 'mischievous innovations'. The subsequent doctrinal wrangling between More and her supporters and

15. John Reeves papers, British Library Add.Ms 16920, R D to Moore 3/12/1792. Another letter to the Reeves Association, from Wooton, equated the whole ethos of dissent with Jacobinism: Cornwall (a curate) to Moore 9/12/1792 (Add.Ms 16921)
16. David Jardine, Seasonable Reflections on Religious Fasts (Bath 1794).

the Anglican vestry was fought publicly across the pages of a whole welter of vindictive pamphlets, and even in anonymous notes stuck up on turnpike gates. The Anglicans accused More of 'labouring to spread French principles', making the children 'pray for the success of the French', and even alleged that she had been tried and found guilty of sedition. The schoolmaster had been heard using 'treasonable and disloyal expressions' and his school was nothing but a 'Nursery of Sedition, hostile to the Ecclesiastical Establishment'; a place in which he

> soon rallied to his standard the restless and turbulent, and all the polluted filth, dross and scum of the parish; and broaching doctrines inimical to the social and moral orders of society.

More hit back, declaring Bere's smears to be nothing but 'a mask for his own democracy and heretical doctrines'. She resolved to bring an action for seditious speech against him for remarks he allegedly made at 'nocturnal meetings' two years previously. Publishers and journals were drawn into the fray as the accusations raged on. More was attacked in the Anti-Jacobin Review, a journal she would ordinarily have supported but which she now rounded on for 'spreading more mischief over the land than almost any other book, because it is doing it under the mask of loyalty'. When Bere published a pamphlet from a printing house that had also once printed Thomas Paine, More was jubilant for

> He has done our cause service with all who have an eye to see... At the end of the book is a list of all the Jacobinical publications which have issued from that shop of sedition.

The Anglican loyalists now found it necessary to scorn More's Cheap Repository Tracts despite the vital role they had played in countering the propaganda of the reforming societies in the early 1790s. Their Bath publisher, Samuel Hazard, (whose loyalism had been celebrated both at the time and two years later when his employees informed against a fellow journeyman for seditious speech) was now singled out for abuse not only because he stood by Hannah More, but because another 'notorious methodist preacher' appointed as a master at her Wedmore school, turned out to be a nephew of his. The Hazard family were Moravians[17]. This incident shows how divisive and destructive of loyalist 'cohesion' religious issues could become, and also indicates the thinness of

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17. Thomas Bere, An Address to Mrs Hannah More on the Conclusion of the Blagdon Controversy (Bath 1801); E Spencer, Truths Respecting Mrs Hannah More's Meeting Houses and the Conduct of her Followers (Bath 1802); L Hart (et al), A Statement of Facts Relative to Mrs Hannah More's Schools, Occasioned by some Late Misrepresentations (Bath 1801); A Layman, The Blagdon Controversy or Short Criticisms of the Late Dispute, (Bath 1801); E Spencer, Truths Respecting Mrs More's Meeting Houses and the Conduct of her Followers (Bath 1802); Rev Hill Wickham (ed) Journals and Correspondence of Thomas Sedgewick Whalley (London 1863); Roberts, Life of Hannah More (London 1834). For the doctrinal context to the dispute, see T W Laqueur, Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture 1780-1850 (Yale 1976), esp. P.74-5. For Moravianism in Bath, and particularly the Hazards, see CC Hankin (ed), Life of Mary Anne Schimmelpennink (London 1858), vol 2, chapters 2 and 3.

the Reevesite veneer of populism. More, for example, considered the drunken bacchanalia of the Paine burnings of doubtful constitutional value and chastised some of her flock at Axbridge for attending one[18]. Many Reevesite Anglicans opposed methodism because it appeared to scorn theological hierarchy and elite priesthood whilst destroying the work ethic of the poor by encouraging them to abandon the fields for prayer. This 'dangerous tendency of Innovation', claimed the Rev. Edmund Spencer, was emphasised with exemplary simplicity by his church warden's complaint:

> Zir, there they bee zinging and baal-jazzing from morning to night; we shall have noobody by and by to do the work, I do zee how 'twool bee[19].

Internal methodist disagreements over the polity of future relations with the Church of England also erupted into angry in-fighting during the 1790s, particularly at Bristol where what was to become known as the Sacramental Controversy caused severe disruptions to the local Circuit. Although the drift towards independent dissent had been brewing within methodism for some years, and the timing of the present controversy was not unconnected with Wesley's death, the debate over the meaning and nature of loyalism in the 1790s turned reasoned argument into local crisis, and spurred the employment of a

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18. A Roberts (ed), Mendip Annals: A Narrative of the Charitable Labours of Hannah and Martha More (London 1859), p.94.
19. Rev E Spencer, op cit., pp.20-22.

Blagdon-style vocabulary amongst the combatants. Technically, the controversy was about the right of methodist congregations to choose unordained preachers from their own meeting houses to administer the sacrament. In the wider sense, it was about the consequences for constitutionalism of rejecting the authority of Establishment, the association of equality with the rejection of traditional hierarchies, popular sovereignty, and the propriety of innovation. For the argument pivoted upon the right of methodist conference (the voice of democratic populism) to make rules which were binding upon chapel trustees. At Bristol, the trustees of the New Room chapel, all of whom were Anglican traditionalists and men of property in the city[20], found their authority challenged by popular and progressive preachers like Samuel Bradburn, a 'Methodist radical in clerical garb'. In 1791, the trustees had sent an address to conference purporting to represent the views of the Bristol Society, expressing opposition to 'all innovations'. The progressive faction, three of whom were accused directly by the trustees of 'innovation' in 1794, adopted a position not unlike that of the Bath freemen to the Corporation, and accused the trustees of autocratic 'tyranny', indifference to 'the People', and

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20. They included William Pine for example, owner of the Bristol Gazette. One progressive called them 'Church bigots': T S A MacQuiban, 'The Sacramental Controversy in Bristol in the 1790s', Bulletin of the Bristol Branch of the Wesley Historical Society, 60, (1991), p.4.

of representing only 'the rich everywhere'[21]. To some extent, the fears of the Church & King Establishment had arisen from the language in which dissenters expressed themselves; the ambiguity of terms like 'liberty' and confusion between calls for civil and social equality. When a dissenter at Frome attacked slavery in language which called for world-wide recognition of the 'rights of nature' of 'equal and universal liberty', he was over-stepping the agenda of loyalist abolitionism[22].

Although dissenters were invariably anxious to declare their loyalism after the Royal Proclamation against sedition in 1792, their reception was not always predictable. Thomas Horner, squire of Mells and chair of Frome's Association, recognised and accepted at face value the professed loyalism of the town's numerous 'anabaptists, Quakers, Presbyterians, Arians, Antinomians, Moravians and what not'[23]: 'Their voices were unanimous, their plaudits universal', he reported'[24]. Frome's methodists attended the town's inaugural RA meeting and presented Horner's committee with a loyal declaration of their own. The Committee of

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21. T S A MacQuiban, op cit., pp.4-8; D Hempton, Methodism and Politics in British Society, 1750-1850 (London 1984), p.63-5; R Davies, A Raymond George and G Rupp (eds), A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain, 4, (London 1988), pp.260-64.
22. A Reply to the Anonymous Author of a Poem Entitled Frome Market House, (Frome & Bath 1790).
23. The description of the town's religious diversity comes from John Wesley's journal as quoted by E P Thompson, Making of the English Working Class, p.39.
24. Reeves Papers BL Add Ms 16922, Horner to Moore 15/12/1792.

the Bath RA, having proudly told the press that men of all religious persuasions were signing their membership book, found it prudent to vet the text of a pamphlet they were printing on consideration that 'pages 12 and 16 contain some expressions which may cause offence to certain religious sects'[25].

But often, Anglican loyalism had no wish to accommodate heterodoxy and in practice made compliance with its founding principles something of an obstacle course for dissenters. Association members were often expected to submit to the Anglican oath of allegiance; the heart of the Test Acts to which dissenters' opposition was well known. The RA at Chard, for example, debarred anyone who refused to take the oath 'as this may in some degree lead to the discovery of those who are real friends to the Constitution'; a move which made an implicit assumption about the disloyalty of dissenters[26]. At Taunton too, the RA was suspicious, particularly perhaps because at least two of the four men who dared raise their arms against their resolutions at an inaugural public meeting were known local dissenters[27].

RA language portrayed reform in the abstract, and by inference, opposition to any laws as irreligious. The

25. Bath RA Minute Book, 29/12/1792, Bath Guildhall Record Office.
26. Reeves Papers, BL Add Ms 16924, Edwards to Moore, 24/1/1793.
27. TS 11/1007/4053, Southey and Beadon to Chamberlaine and White, 23/12/1792. (The other two were said to be magistrates! Their religious views are not recorded).

initial declaration of the London Association at the Crown and Anchor had condemned very generally the 'false philosophy of our pretended Reformers' whilst emphasising that:

> We are told by our Religion, that we are to do unto all men as we would that men should do unto us; and this is realised to us by the firm administration of the law; which suffers no injury to go without a remedy, and affords a remedy equally to the proudest and the poorest.

The same declaration argued that it was 'the pride of BRITONS to boast of their Liberty and Property' and not to 'substitute the notion of Equality in the place of the latter' for they had already got 'as much of Equality as one man can possess without diminishing the Equality of his neighbour'[28]. Yet without reform of the Test Acts, a dissenter's right to Property, however considerable, was no guarantee of Equality or Liberty.

The Dissenters of Devizes drew up their own Loyal Address to the throne in January 1793, rather than put their names to their local RA's Anglican-inspired version. But they were pounced upon at once by supporters of the Church of England for 'language too ambiguous to be understood', and for trying to put up a smoke screen to cover their opposition to 'a material part of the established laws':

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28. Considerations and Resolutions passed by the London RA November 20th 1792, broadside in Bristol Public Library (21896).

> When the chairman is thanked for his 'judicious attention to the object in view' (which is unexplained), it becomes a subject of fair speculation, what that object in view can be?[29].

Matters were not improved by the well-publicised views of Samuel Bradburn, chairman of the Bristol Methodist District, that if methodist leaders insisted on sending Reevesite loyal addresses to the parliament, they would only alienate their grass-roots members; nor either by his own controversial sermon on 'Equality', preached at the Sacramentalists' Portland Chapel at Bristol in 1794[30].

Hobhouse was at pains to define the 'equality' sought by dissenters' committees:

> Belief is involuntary. Every member of society therefore, whose conduct is upright is entitled to equal privileges[31].

He had already made his opposition to social levelling abundantly clear in a public declaration against

> the injustice of placing the idle and the industrious upon the same level... Whilst men have different talents, and different dispositions, an inequality of property cannot but exist, that the scale must soon preponderate on one side or the

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29. Correspondence in Bath Register, 26/1/1793.
30. D Hempton, op cit., p.62; T S A MacQuiban, op cit., p.4.
31. B Hobhouse, Thoughts Humbly Offered to the Mayor and Sherriffs of Bristol and to all Other Dissenters who Accept Corporate Offices... (Bristol 1794).

other, that the equilibrium could not be preserved for a moment[32].

but his attacks on the dissenter-dominated Bristol Corporation for distancing itself from the anti-Test Acts agitation had made him unpopular with the city's Reevesites. His suggestion that the continued denial of civil 'rights' would drive many dissenting manufacturers to emigrate to France or America[33] did not improve matters and by the time of his bid for the parliamentary seat in 1796, Hobhouse's place in the hall of Jacobin infidelity was assured. His jeering opponents declared themselves 'Lovers of the King and true friends of the Constitution both in CHURCH and STATE', and celebrated their victory as a 'GLORIOUS success... in defence of the RELIGION and LAWS of OLD ENGLAND!'[34].

The rev. Charles Daubeny, who opened the first free Anglican church in the country at Bath in an effort to attract working people away from the dissenting chapels of 'the heretics of the day', knew exactly where he stood on the issue of equal rights:

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32. Benjamin Hobhouse, 'Address to the Several Patriotic Societies of London and its Neighbourhood', published in Sarah Farleys Bristol Journal, 22/12/1792.
33. Bath Chronicle 11/2/1790; 4/3/1790. Somerset's dissenters had attempted to have their opposition to the Test Acts incorporated into the platform of the County Association in 1783, but were rebuffed by the Anglican majority.
34. To The Freemen of Bristol (Bristol 1796), election handbill (B12800) in Bristol Public Library, and another headed Huzza! Huzza! Huzza!, Bragge & Sheffield Forever!!! (Bristol 1796).

Natural Equality and Equal Liberty, those popular idols to which the reason of mankind is now clamorously called upon to bow down are not only inconsistent with every civil establishment, but are mo reover imaginary kinds of things which have no real existence.

According to Daubeny, it was precisely doctrines of this kind which were being encouraged by the 'self-constituted teachers' who preached at dissenting chapels[35]. Equality and dissent were thus inseparable and not

> trifles and things indifferent, about which a latitude of opinion might be allowed... (but) errors which are the parents of disorder and confusion... Schism is the parent of heresy and heresy is sin[36].

Whilst Daubeny was fund-raising for his Free Church project, the association of dissent with disloyalty was played up by his supporters. When one accused dissenters of praying in 'Conventicles', a fierce debate began in the correspondence columns of the Bath Chronicle. Dissenters objected to the use of a term which was meant to imply that they indulged in 'unlawful assemblies', and they objected particularly to the Anglican inference that

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35. Rev Charles Daubeny, A Sermon Delivered at St Margaret's Chapel, Bath, On the Necessity of Erecting Some Place of Public Worship For the More Free Accomodation of the Parish of Walcot, and of the Poor in Particular (Bath 1792). The published sermon, which repeatedly stated the case for the subjugation of the poor by the Anglican church, sold phenomenally well, and raised £1,200 for the building appeal - see Daubeny's entry in the DNB.
36. Rev Charles Daubeny, op cit., pp.22-3.

they were 'undermining the State'. 'If meeting in committees and presenting petitions to parliament be daring', chided one indignant dissenter, 'we know who we are in company with' (an allusion to Anglican involvement with the County Associators of the previous decade)[37].

Such attempts to discredit theological rivals by associating them with Jacobinism were bitterly contested and widely resented in dissenting circles, for there was no truth in them. John Clark, a clothier and Baptist minister at Trowbridge recorded his concerns about 'the unhappy spirit of disloyalty and disaffection' that he found in the town, and tried to counter it in classic Anglican style by recourse to carefully chosen Biblical texts. He gave his Fast Day sermon in 1793 from Prov. 24: 'My son, fear thou the lord and the King and meddle not with them that are given to change'[38].

The respectability of dissent has already been noted with regard to its ascendancy within the elite ranks of the Bristol Corporation (where, presuming he did not mind taking the oath of allegiance, many a wealthy merchant dissenter might become mayor). By the turn of the 18th century, dissenting families had risen to mercantile and civic prominence in most aspects of Bristol life - most notably the Quakers, but also the very powerful Unitarian/Presbyterian interest. In the 1780s, the

37. Bath Chronicle 1/3/1792; 8/3/1792; 15/3/1792.
38. J Clark, Memoirs, Written by Himself and Published With Remarks by William Jay (Bath 1810), P.62.

majority of the city's aldermen belonged to this latter group; and until 1775, 25% of the most important merchants in the West Indian and American trade[39]. But as the influence of both these sects appeared to wane at the close of the century, most were content to align themselves with their 'Anglican social equals'[40] on the Corporation. But despite the appearance of political consensus between middling class dissenters and Anglicans, elections could still be won or lost according to the position adopted by dissenting Bristol freemen - at least before the onset of the Church & King backlash in 1792. Religious affiliation sometimes counted for more than 'straightforward' Party allegiance, a point noted and worried over by Lord Sheffield's Whig supporters at the outset of the 1790 contest, for they feared 'if the Dissenters as Dissenters bring a man forward we are undone'[41]. Bristol's two Borough MPs both voted in favour of repealing the Test Acts in 1791, whereas Bath's voted against. Bath's closed Corporation passed a synonymous resolution against repeal, but as G M Ditchfield has pointed out, with a borough franchise limited to 30 men,

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39. Elizabeth Baigent, thesis, P.58-60. At one point in the eighteenth century, every Bristol alderman except one was a regular attender at the prosperous Lewins Mead Unitarian chapel: J Latimer, The Annals of Bristol in the Nineteenth Century (Bristol 1887), p.27.
40. Jonathan Barry, thesis, P.24-6.
41. Letter from Samuel Haywood to William Adam, quoted in D E Ginter, Whig Organisation in the General Election of 1790, (Berkeley 1967), P.165-6.

they could well afford to. Bristol's far larger franchise brought other considerations into play[42].

But despite (or because of) their prominence, dissenters in Bristol Corporation presented an easy target for Church & King polemicists whenever an opportunity presented itself. Thus, inspired by the anti-dissenting/anti-radical Priestley riots at Birmingham in 1791, a flurry of anonymous threatening letters found their way to the mayor of Bristol, promising similar outrages from

> 2000 good hearty hail strong Ruffins which will pull down your fine Manchin House and your fine Baptis Meating House, and not your meating only, but Prisperterines Likewise and Romands and all your Decenters houses shall share the same fate as them at Birmingham[43].

The mayor was John Harris, a delegate the previous year from the city to the London Protestant Dissenters Committee fighting the Test Acts. Attacks on dissenters, and the disruption of their services, continued throughout the 1790s. Services were reported to have been disrupted at Laycock in 1790, at Bristol in 1792 (when phosphorous was thrown), at Wellow in 1794, at New King

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42. Rev. Shickle, Bath Corporation Minutebooks, (typescript in Bath Library), Vol 4 1783-1834; R M Ditchfield, 'The Parliamentary Struggle over the Test and Corporation Acts 1787-1790', English Historical Review, 1974, P.556..
43. Bristol Town Clerk's Letter Boxes, 1791 Box, Bundle 27; Anon to Mayor of Bristol 22/7/1791, and others. See also the correspondence in HO42/19.

Street, Bath in 1795, and at Porton, Wilts in 1796; a meeting house burned down by incendiaries at Colerne in 1799, and so on[44]. The itinerant preacher, Thomas Wastfield, toured a circuit of isolated villages on Salisbury Plain each Sunday. Itinerants were generally careful not to compete with Anglican service times or to entice men away from the fields during harvest, but Wastfield still had to endure considerable opposition. On a single outing in 1797, for example, he encountered an attempt by the vicar and a constable at Enford, by another constable at Netheravon, and by a farmer at Bulford to arrest him, and had eggs thrown at him in Durrington and Bulford[45].

Technically, a preacher and/or any dissenting chapel was protected from disruption by law as long they were licensed. But anxious on the one hand not to create further divisions amongst the people they were trying to befriend, and on the other aware that constables were actually being asked by the Anglicans to arrest them, preachers appear rarely to have risked muddying the waters by following through prosecutions. It was alleged in 1793, that the determinedly anti-Jacobin mayor of

44. Quarter Sessions Minute Book, April 1794, Q/SO 16, Somerset CRO; Bath Chronicle 19/11/1795,; Salisbury Journal 15/2/1796; HO 42/47, T Bourne to Portland 6/4/1799, Bath Chronicle 18/3/1790, Bristol Gazette 2/1/1793.
45. Autobiography and Reminiscences of the Rev William Jay (London 1854), P.37; and 'Thomas Wastfield's Journal' reprinted in D Lovegrove, Established Church, Sectarian People: Itinerancy and the Transformation of English Dissent 1780-1830 (Cambridge 1988), P.166.

Bath, Henry Harington, actually sent two of his officers to attend a Monday evening meeting at one of the city's dissenting chapels because he was 'desirous of distinguishing himself in his new office by collecting important intelligence for the sapient herd at the Crown & Anchor' (where the original London Reeves Association was based). And whilst there, it was said, they heard 'a Jacobin hymn'[46]. Suspicious attitudes like these, current even amongst the civil authorities to whom dissenters should have been able to turn for protection, ensured that preachers remained permanently on the defensive throughout the 1790s.

The charge levelled at evangelists - that they were spreading sedition and disrespect for the authority of the established church amongst the poor - was basically ridiculous. Many itinerant preachers certainly felt critical of the established church, but chiefly because of the failure of the clergy to save the souls of the rural poor. William Jay believed that

> the spiritual condition of many of the villages (around Marlborough) was deplorable and the people were perishing for lack of knowledge. No one cared for their souls[47].

The problem was exacerbated in Somerset, despite the traditional strength of the Anglican church there, by widespread plurality and non-residence, especially in the

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46. Courier 21/11/1793.
47. W Jay, Autobiography, op cit., P.37.

north of the county[48]. To make matters worse, parishes in the North Somerset coalfield were experiencing rapid demographic changes as workers migrated in from the declining woollen belt and took up residence in pit villages. This created a situation where growing population centres like Coleford, with no Anglican church of its own until 1829 despite its position as the largest community in Kilmersdon Parish, were developing outside of the traditional paternal relationship of clergy and parishioners. Coleford was proselytised with great success by itinerant dissenters, as both Methodists and Presbyterians established themselves in the village during the 18th century[49]. A similar picture emerged at Kingswood, where the much talked about lawlessness of the colliers was quietened in the latter part of the eighteenth century after Wesleyan missionaries got amongst them and built the community's first parish church in 1750[50]. An anonymous broadsheet ballad of 1801

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48. Stephen Pole, Crime, Society and Law Enforcement in Hanoverian Somerset, Unpub. Ph D thesis, (Cambridge 1983), P.66-7. Hannah More claimed in 1789 that there were thirteen adjoining Mendip parishes with no resident curate. See W St. J Kemm, A Study of the Church of England in the Diocese of Bath and Wells, 1790-1840 (M A Thesis, Birmingham, 1965), p.5.
49. Lord Hylton, Notes on the History of the Parish of Kilmersdon (Taunton 1910), P.93-102. Non-redidence at Coleford was exacerbated by excessive plurality in neighbouring parishes. Dr John Bishop, for instance, was rector of Mells with Leigh, rector of Holcombe, vicar of Doulting with East Cranmore, West Cranmore, Stoke Lane and Downhead! See W St. J Kemm, op cit., p.38.
50. Robert Malcolmson, 'A Set of Ungovernable People; the Kingswood Colliers in the Eighteenth Century', in John Brewer and John Styles (eds) An Ungovernable People: The English and their Law in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, (London 1979), P.126.

criticised the quality of men selected for the Anglican ministry in North Somerset, often the sons of wealthy agricultural monopolists:

> And bwoys that ote to work at cole-pit
> Are train'd up to disgrace the pulpit
> And when such get an ordinashon
> Thay thin the churches congregation,
> And we dissenters fill the naishon[51].

As they penetrated the countryside, establishing bridgeheads in one village after another, itinerants were careful to assure local dignitaries of their anti-Jacobin intentions. This was not only polite and politic, but practical too, since in many villages the principal squire owned most of the buildings potentially available for licensing, and he was probably the local magistrate as well. Even in 1808, Methodists who bought 'a bit of wasteland' at Great Bedwin in the Savernake Forest were put under pressure to sell it back to Lord Ailesbury by his High Church agent, John Ward. He was determined to prevent

> their attempts to establish a Meeting in a place where it is so thoroughly disagreeable to your Lordship to have one, which instead of doing good, would create division in a place where the regular

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51. A Letter from a Collier in Somersetshire To His Friend in the Town (Bristol 1801).

> minister of the Church conscientiously performs his duty[52].

In an anxious attempt to head off antagonism of this kind, James Harper, an itinerant Methodist preacher, prefaced an approach to Thomas Horner, squire of Mells, for permission to lease the club room at the Bell Inn, with the words,

> I hope that you have been informed that we are members of the Church of England... and that we are loyal subjects to the King and approve of our excellent Constitution[53].

But many beleaguered dissenters believed that it was no longer enough simply to make such public avowals of innocent intention. The methodist Elizabeth Hurrell, who was familiar with the Bristol circuit, lamented the failure of methodists to demonstrate their active opposition to radicalism in their ministry. Itinerants were often in a perfect position to influence the public, particularly in those rural areas neglected by the clergy, and indeed it was this very circumstance that so aroused the suspicions of the Church and King camp. 'I cannot but think', wrote Hurrell to the superintendent of the Bristol Circuit,

> that had our preachers endeavoured to crush the viper's head when it first peep'd, neither church

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52. John Ward to Lord Ailesbury 18/12/1808, from a transcribed letter in the Wiltshire Archaeological Society Library, Devizes, Manuscript Box 205.
53. Mells Manor Muniments, J Harper to T Horner, 13/7/1793.

> nor King would have been in the danger they are now in...[54].

Hers was not a lone voice however, and many methodists were sensible of the challenge before them. The task of the itinerants on the circuit of parishes around Salisbury for example was mapped out with perfect clarity. They were to preach

> good order and subordination in society, from the highest to the lowest... an utter enemy to a rebellious and levelling spirit[55].

Yet still they encountered stiff opposition from the Anglican interest, and a savage internecine pamphlet war ensued between the two parties, of a similar character to that at Blagdon[56]. The Bishop of Salisbury entered the fray in 1798, lamenting the 'vast number of (itinerant) licensed preachers registered in the past year' in the district, and he urged the clergy to recognise the 'dangers of innovation and the false but prevalent philosophy of the times', and its inescapable links with French principles. They must strive therefore to 'prevent the delusions to which the lower classes of the people, especially in the villages, are thereby exposed'[57]. Jay and Wilberforce both acknowledged the potential danger of

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54. Hurrell to Joseph Benson 23/12/1797, quoted in R Davies, A R George and G Rupp (eds), History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain, Vol 4 (London 1988), P.291-2.
55. Quoted by Lovegrove, op cit., P.127.
56. This controversy is detailed by D J Jeremy, 'A Local Crisis Between Establishment and Nonconformity; The Salisbury Village Preaching Controversy 1798-99', Proceedings of the Wilts Arch and Nat Hist Soc, Vol 61 (1966).
57. Salisbury Journal 20/8/1798.

allowing 'improper persons' to undertake preaching tours with the implied authority of a respectable sect, and the latter believed that the Bath and Salisbury circuits were already being abused by 'a number of raw ignorant lads' by 1800[58].

The Baptist Thomas Parsons, may have had fairly radical political views, but he kept his light very much under a bushel throughout the 1790s. His conscience would not allow him to remain the minister of Bath's Gerrard Street chapel in 1791 after the dominant faction in his congregation decided to introduce an Anglican-style 'annual tax upon sittings and pews'[59], but he was not otherwise overtly egalitarian. In 1808 however, when it was safer to say so, Parsons claimed an apparent attachment, of long standing, to Thomas Paine's best known work and launched a feeling attack upon the Anglican Church which one suspects he would not have considered making in the 1790s:

> You affect to sneer at the Rights of Man: on the contrary, I cherish a veneration of them, however for a time subjected to ridicule by those who would be accounted wise! The New Testament sanctions those sacred rights: it was intended to liberate mankind from error and superstition... to call no man

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58. Jay, op cit., P.322.
59. Thomas Parsons, To The Members of the Baptist Society Meeting in Gerrard Street, Bath (Bath 1791).

> Lord... thus breaking the yoke of priestly bondage from their necks[60].

But however much the majority of dissenters made public display of their loyalism, either through loyal declarations to Reeves Associations, or in scrutinising the activities of their own itinerants, their divergence from the acceptable path of loyalism (as defined by the Reeves/Pitt ruling faction) - particularly in their attitude to the War - placed them under continuous suspicion. It could not escape public notice that at Bristol, for example, where debate over the propriety of the War was especially fierce between 1795 & 1797, the key opponents of government policy were Edward Long Fox (a Quaker), Robert Lovell (a Quaker), Joseph Edye (Quaker), Thomas Beddoes (a Deist), Benjamin Hobhouse (a Unitarian), and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (a Unitarian sympathiser). The Unitarians, although considered eminently respectable at Bristol, had, as we have seen, suffered the accusations of 'clerical artifice' at Bath because of the outspokenness of David Jardine (who angered even his own congregation when he invited Coleridge to 'preach' in his chapel on the politically sensitive themes of scarcity and taxation)[61]. Bristol's

60. Thomas Parsons, High Church Claims Exposed and the Protestant Dissenters and Methodists Vindicated (Harlow 1808), P.46.
61. David Jardine, Seasonable Reflections on Religious Fasts (Bath 1794). J Cottle, Reminicenses of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey, (London 1848), P.93-7. Cottle says that the possibility of the poet preaching at the Bristol Chapel was never entertained.

Quakers, despite a respectability equal to the Unitarians, were still regarded as aliens in the city's civic culture for their refusal to take part in the traditional merchant pageantry, festivals and processions with which the city celebrated its historical trading supremacy. As recently as 1780, the sect had suffered an attack by 'the rabble' for their iconoclastic outsiderism[62]. Fox was accused of belonging to a party who 'openly scoff at all religion'[63]. The opposition of sects like these to the War was now seen as further evidence of their disaffection to the government, a point emphasised at Bristol during celebrations to mark the preliminaries of peace with France in 1801, where the magistrates found it necessary to warn their 'fellow citizens'

> to withhold from committing any Outrage by firing guns and pistols in the streets, breaking windows or otherwise, of those WELL-DISPOSED CITIZENS whose peaceable principles are generally known, and who cannot fail to rejoice in the HAPPY EVENT, but who from the peculiar tenets of their religious profession object to demonstrate their Joy on any Public Occasion by Illuminations[64].

In practice, the division was far less clear cut. The Harford family for instance, one of the wealthiest and

62. J Barry, thesis op cit., P.300-10 and 320.
63. A W, Letter to Edward Long Fox MD, (Bristol 1795)
64. Broadside dated 12/10/1801 and preserved in Town Clerk's Letter Boxes, 1801 box, Bristol City Record Office.

most influential in Bristol, were Quakers who actively supported the War from public platforms; forming unlikely alliances with Pittite high church fundamentalists like George (brother of Charles) Daubeny, or the Rev Cholmondely (seconder of a loyalist address) at Bath[65]. In 1804, moreover, a major exchange of public pamphlets was begun by an Anglican curate, Richard Warner, with a sermon preached to the Bath Volunteers and entitled War Inconsistent with Christianity. This man, whose previous record had been one of rigourous opposition to Calvinism and the Evangelicals, now found himself defended and supported by Evangelical Baptists like Thomas Parsons. For Warner, opposition to war was commanded by the New Testament, not by disaffection to government[66], although Parsons declared that

> Patriotism (in the generally admitted acceptation of that term) and active courage are not included in the class of Christian virtues as those virtues are detailed in the New Testament[67].

Once again, dissenters generally were tarred with the brush of disaffection after this controversy subsided, notwithstanding its genesis with an Anglican cleric. An

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65. For Harford, Daubeny and Cholmondely, and their debates with the anti-war party, see Bristol Mercury 6/2/1797 & 15/6/1797, and Bath Journal 9/1/1797.
66. John Cookson, The Friends of Peace, P.33-4. See also Rev Richard Warner, War Inconsistent With Christianity (Bath 1804); W Falconer, A Remonstrance Addressed to the Rev Richard Warner (Bath 1804), and T Falconer, Letter to the Rev Richard Warner (Oxford 1804).
67. Thomas Parsons, Letter to the Rev Thomas Falconer (Bath 1804).

assembly of dissenting ministers met at Shepton Mallet to discuss their response and ruled that since the War should be regarded as 'defensive' rather than aggressive, it was 'entirely consistent with Christianity'. They went further in fact, and publicly recommended all members of their congregations to join the Volunteers and 'learn the use of arms for the defence of their country'[68].

Dissenters faced similar distrust over their conduct in 'infiltrating' Anglican Sunday Schools (as the Blagdon Controversy showed), and in attempting to set up their own. Anglicans were often in two minds about the 'usefulness' of educating the poor themselves. Hannah More, who was not a dissenter but fraternised with methodists, was keenly aware of the problem too, whatever her High Church critics may have said about her Sunday Schools. As she explained to Thomas Whalley:

> I am extremely limited in my ideas of instructing the poor. I would confine it entirely to the Bible, Liturgy and Catechism, which indeed include the whole of my notion of instruction. To teach them to read without giving them principles seems dangerous; and I do not teach them to write, even in my weekly schools[69].

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68. Bath Journal 2/1/1804.
69. Quoted in Rev Hill Wickham (ed), Journals and Correspondence of Thomas Sedgewick Whalley (London 1863), Vol 2, P.142.

Indeed it was this very concern, she assured Thomas Bowdler, a member of the Bath RA Committee, that made her realise the utility of 'safe books' which

> induced me to the laborious undertaking of the Cheap Repository Tracts, which had such great success that above two millions were sold in one year in the height of our domestic troubles[70].

These 'simple words to open the eyes of the uneducated people, dazed by the words 'liberty' and 'equality'', were the inspiration behind the dissenting evangelists' Religious Tract Society of 1799[71]. Bath's Sunday Schools, of which there were 30 by 1789, had overcome considerable criticism at their inception four years earlier to become fully integrated to the demands of popular loyalism.

Charles Daubeny, having accepted by 1792 the propensity of Sunday Schools to 'preserve the rising generation from the growing errors of the day', saw his Free Church at Walcot as their pupils' natural next step on the road to Anglican salvation. 'The Common People are but just within the pale of civilised society', he declared. Unless Anglicans in the battle against dissent on the one hand and radicalism on the other were armed with their own educational institutions from which to give them 'proper information',

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70. Hannah More to Thomas Bowdler, quoted in Martha More, Mendip Annals (London 1859), P.6-7.
71. M A Hopkins, Hannah More and her Circle, P.205; and Lovegrove, op cit., P.111.

> the peace of society will at times stand upon a precarious foundation... for what is an ungovernable mob but the picture of men in their uncivilised state?[72].

Until 1791, when Jardine established a Unitarian Sunday School at Frog Lane, the Bath schools were all Anglican-run. In many respects, their politics simply mirrored those of the weekday Charity Schools, which were also under strict Anglican control. Nonconformist involvement in their organisation was vigorously resisted by the Anglican clergy - as illustrated by the experience of the Baptist minister Isaac Taylor at Calne who was asked by the Marquis of Lansdown to oversee the establishment of a Charity School in that town in 1785. 'The clergy opposed his Lordship's intentions, lest the children should become Dissenters', recorded Taylor, and the entire initiative had to be shelved[73]. When the opportunity for attachments between Church and King loyalism and the Sunday Schools presented itself most strongly in 1792-3, Anglicans were therefore well-placed to take advantage of it. Hannah More captured the spirit perfectly with her 1793 'Festival of the Sunday Schools' on a Mendip hilltop. Crowds of approving spectators (some said as many as 10,000) from the 'most respectable families' bore approving witness to the orderly march of 940 poor

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72. Rev C Daubeny, op cit., P.23-5.
73. Diary of Isaac Taylor of Calne, reprinted in the Baptist Magazine, November 1861 (Wilts Archaeological Society Library, Devizes - Wiltshire Tracts Vol 3)

children from nine Mendip schools to the top of the hill. Beneath floral garlands inscribed with patriotic cliches, the children hammered their way through 'God Save the King', then settled at their tables for a free feast of bread, beef pudding and cider. The loyalist press celebrated an initiative which had demonstrated the pastoral care of the English connection between Church and State, and provided such vivid contrasts to the wretched conditions of famine and infidelity by then current in republican France[74].

Radicalism and the Millenium

Whilst not discounting the atheism of Robert Watson, the deism of Thomas Beddoes, nor even what a coroner's jury was to call the 'insanity' of the Bristol baker who committed suicide after becoming a 'convert to the infernal doctrines contained in Paine's Age of Reason', there is no evidence that a majority of South Western radicals followed Paine's rejection of organised religion[75]. Unsurprisingly, we know of none who publicly declared their support for Anglicanism, but several who were, or who were said to be, dissenters.

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74. Bath Chronicle 22/8/1793, 29/8/1793. These were to become annual events and developed beyond the Mendip area. By 1815 for example, over 1000 children took part in the annual Sunday School Festival at Bath, raising their glasses not only to the King and to Sunday Schools, but to the elite local Corporation as well. Thomas W Laqueur, Religion & Respectability: Sunday Schools & Working Class Culture 1780 - 1850 (New Haven 1976), P.178.
75. The coroner's hearing for the baker is in Bristol Gazette, 3/8/1797.

Reevesite informers rarely missed an opportunity to include comments about the religious inclinations of their victims when possible. Whitehall was therefore informed that John Campbell was 'an American by birth, a dissenter', and that the meetings of the Bath Corresponding Society were attended mostly by anabaptists and other dissenters[76]. Another radical bookseller and his brother were both 'Dissenters and of Levelling Principles'[77]. Similarly, the prosecution's case against another radical, Thomas Wylde, included an allegation that his employer was an American dissenter, and there are indications that a man dismissed form his employ on the Savernake estate by the Earl of Ailesbury, ostensibly for erroneously felling some elm trees, had actually aroused the Earl's ill-feeling for the suspicion that he was a dissenter and probably therefore disloyal. Ailesbury's Agent, surprised at the severity of the punishment, tried to vouch for the man's character, for

> as to his being a Presbyterian, it is of the Scotch church, and I believe him to be as warm a loyalist as I am myself. At least, I have seen him in many cases very violent against republicanism in his neighbours[78].

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76. HO 42/30, anon to Dundas, 12/5/1794.
77. TS 24/2/7, S Vezey (Bath) to White, 9/12/1792.
78. Savernake Estate Papers, 1300/2360, Ward to Ailesbury 30/4/1795, Wilts County Record Office.

E P Thompson's suggestion that methodist growth correlates to the suppression of radicalism, making it a 'chiliasm of despair' and a 'component of the psychic processes of counter-revolution'[79] is difficult to test in this region. Surviving class lists are scarce and the Bristol District in particular was engaged in the damaging and acrimonious internal 'Sacramental Controversy' during the years when political repression was most overt 1792-1796. A confrontation during service at the traditionally-run New Room in 1794 prompted a walk out by a third of the members, who relocated at the recently built Portland Chapel. These progressives, all of them 'lower class', numbered only 100 according to the pro-Anglican party, but it was later claimed that 819 of the 1000 members who attended an emergency District Meeting at Bristol were committed Portlandites. Total Circuit membership at this time was 1600[80]. The Thompson thesis is difficult to test here because Circuit membership fell by 300 between 1793 and 1797 - the years of deepest rancour - against the national trend of rapid growth (especially in 1794 when membership nationally rose by more than 13%)[81]. The following membership figures taken from the Conference minutes show no remarkable 'revival' in this region although general

79. E P Thompson, Making of the English Working Class (op cit.), pp.419 & 427.
80. The conflicting figures are cited by T S A MacQuiban, 'The Sacramental Controversy in Bristol in the 1790s' Bulletin of the Bristol Branch of the Wesley Historical Society, 60, (1991), pp.11-12 & 20.
81. For national figures see D Hempton, Methodism and Politics in British Society, 1750-1850 (London 1984), p.74.

growth is steady. I have separated the figures for Bristol from the rest of the regional tally to accommodate 'sacramental' disruption. The relevant Western Circuits other than Bristol included here are Taunton, Sarum, Bradford on Avon, Bath, Shepton Mallet, Banwell and Downend:

Date	Bristol	Other Circuits	Total.
1787	1864	1997	3861
1788	2040	2075	4115
1789	2203	2201	4404
1790	1841	2391	4232
1791	1562	2394	3956
1792	1600	2414	4014
1793	1650	2612	4262
1794	1615	2785	4400
1795	1645	1835	3481[82]
1796	1500	2518	4018
1797	1380	2627	4007
1798	1600	2735	4335
1799	1950	2923	4873
1800	1950	3300	5250
1801	1450	3113	4563
1802	1450	3143	4593
1803	1544	3265	4809
1804	1633	3278	4911
1805	1609	3593	5202

It is possible that the Bristol dispute encouraged recruitment amongst political radicals however for it seems likely that overall decline was the result of pro-Anglican secession for which no accurate figure can be put[83]. It is certainly true that Church Methodism lost ground substantially to more innovative and populist

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82. The 1795 Conference minutes omit membership figures for the Bath circuit so the totals given here are too low. If membership remained as high as in 1794, the figures would still only be 2315 and 4061 respectively, a decrease on the previous year's tallies.
83. T S A MacQuiban, op cit., p.12.

forms of organisation during the 1790s, and as I suggested earlier, the language through which this dispute was expressed was related directly to contemporary vocabularies of radicalism and loyalism. A search through the class lists for the Portland Chapel reveals only one familiar name, John King's, but it appears more than once and cannot be accurately identified as the radical John King of Union Street since neither addresses nor occupations are included. This King was already a member in 1796, the date of the earliest surviving class list[84]. I have been unable to discover class lists of any other circuits in the region for the 1790s.

Outside the parameters of respectable dissent however, it has been suggested that some radicals found legitimation for their persecuted beliefs - both spiritual and secular - in the more apocalyptic passages of the Bible, and it is to this possibility that I now want to focus attention[85]. The pacification by Methodism of the Kingswood colliers, referred to by Malcolmson, has recently been ascribed to the prevalence of rural belief

84. Bristol Society Class Lists, 1796-1799, Bristol City Record Office. There was, for example, a John King, surgeon, of Clifton.
85. Besides texts mentioned elsewhere in this section, the subject has been investigated by Thomas Knox, 'Thomas Spence: The Trumpet of Jubilee', Past & Present,76, (1977); and Malcolm Chase, 'From Millenium to Anniversary: The Concept of Jubilee in Late Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century England', Past & Present,129. The latter is particularly valuable for its analysis of the appropriation of the term 'Jubilee' by Loyalists, a repetition of the practice they had earlier adopted with regard to 'patriotism'.

in 'magic', prophesy, and divine judgements[86], but it is difficult to reconstruct the tenets of popular radical dissent because few known radicals left any record of their faith.

John Campbell is an exception. He was a member of the methodist congregation at New King Street, Bath, and a supporter and fundraiser for the Wesleyan-founded Strangers Friend Society. His methodism was not straightforwardly Wesleyan however, but millenarian. According to Campbell, the prophesies of the seventeenth century Huguenot, Pierre Jurieu, and latterly of Wesley's colleague John Fletcher had

> thrown a great deal of light upon the prophesies relating to the fall of Anti-Christ and the setting up of the Kingdom of Christ on Earth.

He also believed that the French Revolution was the fulfilment of those prophesies and, more importantly in the English context, the catalyst for further changes 'which will shortly take place in other parts of Europe'[87]. His published work on Jurieu accordingly discussed:

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86. Robert Malcolmson, 'A Set of Ungovernable People; the Kingswood Colliers in the Eighteenth Century', in John Brewer and John Styles (eds), An Ungovernable People: The English and their Law in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, (London 1979), P.125-6; and J Barry, thesis, op cit., P.285..
87. J C B Campbell, Prophesies of the Remarkable Events Now Taking Place in Europe, by the Late John Fletcher in a Letter to the Late John Wesley, written in 1755, (Bath 1793). Joseph Priestley had been known to use similar language. See C Garrett, 'Joseph Priestley, the Millenium and the French Revolution, Journal of the History of Ideas, 34, (1973). See also Campbell's

> The humiliation of the French monarchy, the Fall of Popery, the Destruction of Tyranny, the Equalization of Mankind, and the abolition of Titles, Honours, monasteries, nunneries etc[88].

The imminent collapse of corruption, privilege and patronage was thus invested with a certain inevitability as far as radicals like Campbell were concerned, and faith like this was a valuable commodity with repression lurking in the wings. But Campbell's beliefs have survived the last 200 years for the sole reason that, as a publisher, he was able to leave them in print. He does not appear to have been a member of any identifiable millenarian sect outside methodism. His language was occasionally apocryphal, as this appeal on behalf of the Strangers Friend Society demonstrates:

> Oh ye Rich professors of the religion of Jesus in this city and its neighbourhood... think of the Wretched and open your hands...[89].

Campbell demonstrates extravagant Enthusiasm and a radical distaste for moneyed hypocrisy[90].

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edition of Predictions of the Singular Events Which Have Recently Taken Place in France... Extracted From A Work Printed in the Year 1687 by M Pierre Jurieu, (Bath 1793), and W H Oliver, Prophets and Millenialists: The Uses of Biblical Prophecy in England from the 1790s to the 1840s (Aukland 1978), P.42-3.

88. See advert printed in Bath Register 2/3/1793.
89. J C B Campbell, op cit.,
90. The Society was no radical 'front' however, at least not by design. Established on the Wesleyan model, it operated by sanction of the mayor and magistrates 'for the suppression of vagrants and imposters and the relief of occasional distress and the encouragement of the industrious poor'. See 101st

Fashionable society at Bath, perhaps more openly than most other towns, was always susceptible to charges of frivolity from religious moralists. But tract writers could reach a wider audience than the one they customarily aimed their published sermons at if they adopted a simple vocabulary and criticised the rich for indifference in the face of scarcity. Bath, cried an anonymous pamphleteer in 1795, was the 'Grand centre of Vanity and Dissipation'. A manuscript addition to Bath Library's copy goes further:

> I call it the city of Mirth and Melancholy; for whilst numbers are sent thither to die; others seem to think they have nothing better to do but to dance[91].

Social criticism is not, of course, the same thing as radicalism or millenarianism, but at times it seemed to speak the same language.

Campbell's interest in Jurieu is of some help to us in any search for a popular millenarian presence in the South West. The Huguenot had been a founding father of the refugee French Prophet sect, whose members crossed the channel for asylum in 1702 and established a small network of sympathetic acolyte groups. One sect developed

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Report of the Bath Benevolent or Strangers' Friend Society (Bath 1891).

91. Some Thoughts on the Manner of Spending the Passion Week. Addressed to the Fashionable World, but Particularly to the Polite Circles in the Gay City of Bath (Bath & London 1795).

at Bristol, where the old and familiar themes of imminent judgement, famine and the downfall of aristocratic and papal power were presumably re-invoked. But when Methodism made Bristol its stronghold in the second half of the century, the Prophets were effectively swallowed up by it[92].

When in 1795, a Government informer testified during the trial for Treason of Richard Brothers that

> there are certain religious societies in the Kingdom, almost in every town, whose sentiments lead them strictly to republicanism

and named Bristol as one of the worst eight in the country, he may have been including ordinary methodists in his complaint. But, bearing in mind that Brothers was a celebrated millenarian visionary and radical who had been thoroughly disowned by respectable dissent, it would seem unlikely. There were certainly other kinds of fringe dissent blessed with radical approval at Bristol at this time. The Swedenborgians became established at both Bristol and Bath during the 1790s, and at the latter city included amongst their adherents the secretary of the Chartist Association, Thomas Bolwell and his brother and fellow Chartist, Charles by the late 1830s[93].

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92. C Garrett, Respectable Folly: Millenarianism and the French Revolution in England and France (Baltimore 1975), P.147-8; J F C Harrison, The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism 1780-1850 (London 1979) P.25; Elizabeth Baigent, Bristol Society in the Later Eighteenth Century... (D.Phil Thesis, Oxford 1985) P.61-2.
93. For Brothers' trial transcript see Howell, State Trials, Vol 24, P.783. For the Swedenborgians see

In the years preceding Brothers' trial, Bristol became a temporary home to William Bryan, a one-time Quaker who converted to millenarianism during an expedition to Avignon to find another set of French 'prophets' in 1788. He was later to throw in his lot with Richard Brothers, but whilst at Bristol in 1794 he made a living as a druggist and herbalist, specialising in diagnosis by spiritual empathy. Bryan's recurring eschatological visions brought him a degree of attention, the poet Southey visiting him in October for example. Like Campbell, Bryan was convinced that the French Revolution, that agent of 'purity and perfection', presaged the second coming of Christ, preparing the ground by clearing away 'papal tyranny and authority'. Before the end of the decade, he predicted, other revolutions would sweep corruption and privilege from Europe. Bristol itself, its wealth built on the misery of slavery, and its administrators stained with the murder of their own people by their actions in the Bridge Riot, he cast as the Whore of Babylon and spoke confidently of its destruction. In December 1794, God came to him in a vision and declared

> Woe to this city of Bristol! The cry of innocent blood is against it: it shall be shaken and fall[94].

E P Thompson, M O T E W C, P.53; Bogue and Bennett, History of the Dissenters (London 1809), Vol 4 P.126-34; and for Bolwell's connection with them see the christenings recorded at the New Church, Chandos Buildings, Bath (Mormon Catalogue)

94. C Garrett, Respectable Folly, op cit., P.175-8.

Whatever they thought of the fringe theology of men like Bryan, Bristol's radical reformers and critics of the Corporation must have approved of his sentiments. Biblical language was not fringe. Writers of anonymous threatening letters for example, the texts of which were regularly published for general consumption, employed it extensively for the mystery and unarguable righteousness of its tone[95]. The use of apocalyptic language by the disinherited as a weapon against property and hierarchy derived its power from the 'magic' of inversion, of turning the world upside down. The Wiltshire landowner William Dyke, for example, was promised 'Hell Flames' if he didn't do something to sink the spiralling wheat markets in 1800, a Biblically inspired prophesy with a very earthly resolution - arson upon his house, barns and stables![96] In its popular inverted form, this was very much a plebeian language. The radicals may have welcomed Bryan's theological metaphors as far as they supported their own political critique, but few will have relished a more literal interpretation. If the French revolutionary armies were really the cleansing agents of the Almighty, news of Tate's attempt to raze Bristol to the ground should have been received with joy in radical circles.

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95. See E P Thompson, 'The Crime of Anonymity', in Hay, Linebaugh et al. (eds), Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth Century England (London 1975), P.301-2.
96. Anonymous note published in London Gazette, 8-11/3/1800.

Although the strength of sympathy for 'radical' visionaries like Bryan and Brothers cannot be accurately assessed in the South West, the followers of the prophetess, Joanna Southcott, are easier to trace. The success of Southcottianism in Somerset was largely due to the accident of Southcott's birth in neighbouring Devon, and partly it seems to the established strength of methodism in the county[97]. Thompson believes that 'there is no doubt that the Southcott cult wreaked great havoc in the Methodist camp, notably in Bristol...[98]', and whilst there is little evidence of this, it is certainly true that she attracted an impressive number of adherents in the region, at least for a short period. If one accepts that the total of 'sealed' (ie. confirmed) Southcottian believers in Bristol (67), Bath (77), and Bridgwater (34) only obscures a much larger number of passive sympathisers, then the numbers at Crewkerne (265) and nearby Dowlish (300) are particularly impressive. These two latter congregations, in the far south of the county, dwarf even the number of believers at her (much larger) home town of Exeter (145), or of anywhere else in Devon, and they are topped only by those at London (2,083) and Sheffield (350)[99]. The suggestion that

97. J F C Harrison notes that the geographical distribution of 'sealed' Southcottians nationally bears a close resemblance to the geography of Methodism, op cit., P.110.
98. E P Thompson, Making of The English Working Class P.426.
99. J K Hopkins, Joanna Southcott: A Study of Popular Religion and Radical Politics 1789 - 1814, (Ph. D thesis, Austin, Texas 1972), P.170 & 422. The figure for Dowlish is not given by Hopkins - whose sources are limited to those at his own university - but by

'sealed' believers were not total congregations is supported by figures for three Somerset villages; Maplestone (1), West Chinnock (1) and Winscombe (2).

Southcott's prophesies achieved their wide currency partly because they were not so politically contentious as Brothers'. In the West Country far more than in the North, certain Anglican clerics like Robert Ashe of Crewkerne, fell under her spell and turned their congregations in her favour. Anglican services were adaptable to Southcottian ritual forms without substantial alteration, and this may account for the abnormally large Southcottian following at Crewkerne. Another clergyman, Samuel Eyre at Bristol, opened a separate premises for the Southcottians, leading to a slightly smaller following there. Evidence of this kind suggests a predominantly non-radical form of Southcottism in the South West, although little is known of rank and file motivations. Evidence of radical sympathy for the sect is absent - unless the John King from whom Eyre's son Robert borrowed money on Southcott's behalf in 1806 was the ex-radical of Union Street[100]. Although she undoubtedly appealed to sections of Brothers' following

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Harrison, op cit., footnote on P.248), and drawn from records in the British Library; a further indication that the known figures should not be regarded as conclusive.

100. It is a possibility since the Southcottian John King is thought to have been an ex-radical who had lately turned to millenarianism. See J F C Harrison, op cit., pp.128 and 252, footnote 47.

too, Southcott was careful not to ally herself too strongly with his legacy:

> The spirit of the Lord hath visited Brothers but in his answer in the vision he spake from himself and not from me... you may rely on some of Brothers' words but you cannot believe all the prophet hath told you[101].

Later, Southcott was more specific, referring directly to Brothers' 'blasphemy'[102]. She was also unequivocally francophobic, which must have helped, but her millenarian message was not always as decidedly pro-war effort as one modern scholar, John Hopkins, has suggested[103]. Indeed, the breadth of her appeal may well have lain in the political ambiguity or imprecision of her writing. In a prophesy dealing with the famine of 1795 for example, received by Southcott in 1792, she attributed scarcity to the fact that 'it is thy heavenly father is angry with the land', leaving the reader to determine the precise cause of the Lord's chagrin. It is a somewhat different approach to Hannah More's plain-speaking evangelical loyalism which, during that same famine, counselled sternly against 'every disposition to rebellion against the higher powers' and claimed the scarcity was 'a trial to the rich as well as the poor'. More concurred over the admonitory role of the Almighty in the crisis, but was much clearer about His aims:

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101. Joanna Southcott to Rev Thomas Webster 21/6/1801, in Southcott, Letters Etc., (London 1801), P.4.
102. J Southcott, A Communication Given to Joanna in Answer to Mr Brothers' Last Book (Exeter 1802).
103. J K Hopkins, op cit., P.372 passim.

He marked our angry spirits rise
Domestic hate increase
And for a while withheld supplies
To teach us love and peace[104].

Southcott was also apt to use language which, in 1792 when it was written, was suggestive of meanings other than the theologically obvious. Passing from the standard eschatological fare of 'the day is nigh at hand that shall burn like an oven; and all the wicked shall be burnt up as stubble', for instance, she cautioned:

> Are your ways equal or mine unequal, O House of Israel? Judge ye: Are not my ways equal? Are not your ways unequal, O House of Israel? Fear ye the rod...[105]

It was, perhaps, odd language to use at a time when the definition of the concept of 'equality' was being so hotly and devisively debated in the country, and Reeves Associations in every town poured scorn upon 'the new-fangled doctrine of equality'.

Regardless of its founder's political intentions however, what Southcottism had in common with the anti-establishment visions of Brothers, Campbell and Bryan was

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104. J Southcott, Strange Effects of Faith: With Remarkable Prophesies Made in 1792 etc., of Things Which are to Come (Exeter 1801), P.27; Hannah More, 'Sermon at Shipham, 1795', reproduced in Martha More, Mendip Annals (London 1859), P.151-2; Hannah More, A Hymn of Praise for the Abundant Harvest of 1796, (Bath 1796).
105. J Southcott, Strange Efects of Faith P.25-6.

a belief in the imminence of apocalypse. The economic and social transitions of the later eighteenth century, particularly the dramatic inversions of the French Revolution, reminded many of the 'signs' of Revelation, and the inevitability of Judgement. It was not only the occurrence or threat of revolution, war, disease and famine that stalked the collective sub-conscious in the 1790s, but memories of freak weather conditions too. A bad harvest in 1782 for example, threatened famine in 1783 after crops were destroyed and people killed throughout the South West by extraordinarily severe electric storms. The newspapers became fixated by unexplained lights in the sky, unusually high seas, 'earthquakes' and death and destruction caused by 'balls of fire'[106]. During the lean summer of 1795, an 'unexpected calamity' (driving rain, freezing winds and hail in June) destroyed a quarter of the sheep on Salisbury Plain, ruining some farmers[107]. When Hannah More and Joanna Southcott explained the scarcities of the 1790s as symptoms of Divine displeasure, loyalists and non-loyalists alike wrestled with the implications. The Anglican Southcottian minister at Bristol for instance, Samuel Eyre, was still on the look out for lights in the sky and poor harvests in the 1830s[108]. One did not have

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106. See Bath Chronicle 19/6/1783 and 26/6/1783 for the scarcity; and 20/8/1783 & 27/8/1783 for detailed accounts of the storms. Deaths from disease in the 1790s peaked during the aftermath of the two most severe scarcity periods.
107. Courier 24/6/1795.
108. J F C Harrison, op cit., p.117.

to be a supporter of the French Revolution to interpret it as one of the signs of apocalypse.

Southcott's success at Bristol, and perhaps at Bath also, was additionally boosted by her brief association with the former city during 1798. With a brother already settled there (who opposed her divinity), Joanna received a message from the Lord ordering her to Bristol 'to make known my prophesies'. She spent some six months at this task, aided initially by a Bristol bookseller named Brown, and competing for public attention by offering wagers to city gentlemen that the French monarchy would not be restored in 1799 (a fairly safe bet). When her brother suffered a financial disaster after she left, her followers claimed she had predicted that too[109].

There is scant record of the Southcottian congregation she left behind her at Bristol, save that thanks mainly to the unshakable enthusiasm of its preacher, Samuel Eyre, a chapel survived until his death in 1854. In 1805, Joanna's brother (now converted), began advertising her published prophesies from a shop on Broad Quay, and Eyre's Small Street chapel was open for worship and readings twice weekly[110]. By 1808, there were almost 100 regular attenders[111], further proof that 'sealed' members

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109. J Southcott to Thomas Webster, 22/11/1801, reproduced in Joanna Southcott, Divine and Spiritual Letters of Prophesies (London 1801), P.53-6.
110. John Latimer, Annals of Bristol in the Nineteenth Century, (Bristol 1970 edition), P.25-6.
111. J F C Harrison, op cit., P.250, note 21.

were less than the total, and there is no indication that they ever turned from their faith with the ferocity of Ashe's flock at Crewkerne, who burned Joanna's effigy when she died without giving birth to the promised 'Second Coming', Shiloh[112]. After her death in 1814, many of the furnishings and effects from the Small Street chapel - including an autographed Bible 'full of hieroglyphic pencil marks', were auctioned off[113].

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I have argued that the connections between dissent and Jacobinism were largely a false construct of the Anglican Church and its secular political allies in the Reeves movement. The antagonism of the Established Church to 'innovative' religion was enhanced during the 1790s by the fear of failure in their mission to guide the poor away from the infidelity and non-deferential philosophy of the French Revolution. The fact that many men with a sympathy for reform were also known to be dissenters, caused the clergy to view the rapid spread of itinerancy in rural backwaters by 'unqualified' or 'self-appointed' preachers, with mounting anxiety. Against this onslaught, and caught at a disadvantage in the light of the language they had only recently been employing in favour of repealing the Test Acts, dissenters defended their

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112. Harrison, op cit.
113. Bath Chronicle 19/1/1815.

loyalism with difficulty and, often, with little apparent success.

It is taken as read that those radicals or Jacobins who professed an interest in religion were far more likely to belong to a dissenting sect than to the Church of England, and that it is therefore a truism that large numbers of radicals were dissenters. Nevertheless, there is little surviving evidence of religious behaviour amongst South Western radicals, and nothing to support E P Thompson's supposition that radicals took solace in the spiritual salvation of methodism because their efforts to create a better life in this world were frustrated by political repression. They may have given their support to millenarian prophets for precisely those reasons, and they certainly had opportunities presented to them through the publications of John Campbell, and the direct leadership of Bryan and Southcott; what is lacking is detailed evidence. Campbell's millenarian enthusiasm, it should be remembered, was not visited upon him as the result of political despair, but was grounded in the high hopes and portents he still saw in the French Revolution in 1793. Methodism for Campbell, and perhaps for others like him, was not the 'Valley of Humiliation' postulated by Thompson, and there is no reason to suppose that he 'entered it unwillingly, with many backward looks' nor that 'whenever hope revived, religious revivalism was set aside'[114].

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114. E P Thompson, op cit., p.427.

Chapter Seven

Trade Unionism in the 1790s:
Conflict and Deference in the Workplace

Several historians have commented upon the rapid advance of trade unionism that took place towards the end of the eighteenth century. For Roger Wells, the scarcity years from 1794-6 were a 'seminal period of union activity'. For C R Dobson, 'the great inflation of the 1790s... brought trade unionism to the centre of public debate'[1]. Since the 1790s were also a period of technological change in the west country woollen industry and a period of intense political debate, the question of linkage between trade unionism and economic conditions on the one hand, and plebeian radicalism on the other, is a crucial one. Whilst it will be seen that there is little evidence of direct radical influence in the workplace, the fact remains that certain trades were more visible than others in the radical societies. This section explores the

1. Roger Wells, Insurrection, the British Experience, 1795-1803 (Gloucester 1983), p.48; C R Dobson, Masters and Journeymen: a Prehistory of Industrial Relations, 1717-1800, (London 1980), p.29. See also N McCord & D E Brewster, 'Some Labour Troubles of the 1790s in North East England', International Review of Social History (1968), pp.366-383.

structure of workplace politics in the 1790s, scrutinizes the role of hegemony and deference between masters and men in conflict; and looks in detail at trade disputes, the issues that caused them, and the tactics resorted to by either side. Finally, it discusses the impact of the political reform debate from a trade perspective and considers the evidence for links between work and radicalism.

With the exception of a number of disputes affecting the tailoring trades, industrial militancy in the region during the 1780s had been centred upon the reaction of workers in the Somerset/Wiltshire border weaving towns to the introduction of machinery[2]. What sets the 1790s apart is the diversity as much as the sheer number of trade disputes, particularly in 1792 when an outbreak of union militancy affected not only the Trowbridge weavers but painters, tilers, plasterers, sail-cloth dressers, masons, bricklayers, pipe-makers, plumbers, bakers, tailors and shoemakers in Bristol, staymakers and shoemakers in Bath, and colliers from Kingswood and Mendip[3].

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2. This assertion is based on newspaper evidence alone, but see particularly Bath Chronicle 21/6/1781; 30/8/1781 (weavers); 24/2/1785 (tailors); Bath Journal 17/3/1788; Salisbury Journal 3/11/1788 (weavers). An excellent background source is Adrian Randall, Before the Luddites: Custom, Community and Machinery in the English Woollen Industry 1776-1809, (Cambridge 1991). For striking weavers at Wellington in 1789, see G Allen & R Bush, The Book of Wellington (Buckingham 1981), p.39-40.
3. For sources, see table of workplace disputes, below.

Wages and inflation

Although journeymen in the artisan trades occasionally combined to resist piecework or long hours, the majority of disputes centred upon straightforward wage claims, or upon resistance to machinery in the weaving sector[4]. Wage demands in the 1790s were largely fuelled by spiralling inflation after a long period in which many trades had been offered no advance at all. At Bath for instance, the men's' shoemakers in 1792 and the women's' in 1795 both prefaced strikes for wages with reminders to the public that 'the price at present paid to the men is no more than was paid twenty years ago', although their masters' profits had risen steadily[5]. In March 1796, with the provision scarcity not yet over and prices still very high, another wage dispute hit the shoemaking trade, this time at Bristol, when the masters devalued the journeymen's earnings by deducting the cost of closing materials (like flax) from their pay. Faced with an estimated loss of 7d on every pair of shoes finished, the

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4. For piecework see below; for long hours see case of Bristol's journeyman plumbers in 1792, who wanted an obligatory unpaid hour taken off their working day: Felix Farley's Bristol Journal 7/4/1792. The Bath shoemaking dispute of 1813 was fought over the twin issues of wage reduction and apprenticeship. The control and limitation of apprentices had been a major cause of weaving disputes during the 1780s. The Wiltshire shearmen discussed opposition to the truck system in 1802, but possibly only as an alibi for machine-breaking meetings: Adrian Randall, op cit., p.169. Weavers in Frome did launch a major campaign against truck, but not until 1823: Bath & Cheltenham Gazette, 7/4/1813 & 29/7/1823.
5. Bath Journal 12/3/1792, Bath Chronicle 14/5/1795.

men struck work, demanding to know how they were to survive on 1/4d a day

> to support a wife and perhaps a family in this season of general distress when most of the necessaries of life are raised in price three times as much as they were some time since.

They considered even their own claim for a further 6d on each pair of shoes 'not near adequate to the exigencies of the times, and therefore below mediocrity'[6]. Similar sentiments underpinned a request from Bristol's carpenters and joiners in 1799 that their masters

> take into consideration the advanced price of every article of life and to observe that our present wages are the worst of any trade whatever... If our wages are advanced to 18/- a week, it will not be so good to us as when we had 12/- a week[7].

Mendip's miners were paid by the shift or 'turn' and had few opportunities to earn as much as most town artisans had come to expect. A strike throughout the coalfield gained them an extra 2d to 3d a day in 1792, but this still left the best paid men (the hewers) on an average of 10/- a week; less than their counterparts in South Wales or northern England were earning. The Kingswood miners struck immediately after the Mendip dispute ended and won a claim for parity[8]. By contrast, wages were

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6. Bristol Gazette 24/3/1796.
7. Bristol Gazette 13/6/1799.
8. J A Bulley, 'To Mendip for Coal', Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological & Natural History Society, 98, (1953), p.39; Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 18/8/1792.

relatively high amongst skilled journeyman weavers and shearmen - around 20/- a week at Frome or Bradford in 1796, dropping to 12/- or 15/- for scribblers[9]. The London radical, John Thelwall, travelling through Wiltshire in 1797, claimed to have discovered six year-old children in a spinning out-work village near Wilton earning as much as 11/6d a week, although this contrasts markedly with the Bath cleric Richard Warner's description of conditions at Wilton. He found looms

> in the house of every poor inhabitant, by which a woman and boy are enabled, in three weeks, to earn the miserable pittance of ten shillings[10].

Agricultural workers were afforded some protection from inflation by the preferential prices often taken by their employers for grain and other basic provisions. Despite the expected demand for farm labour to supplement army enlistment however, wages were generally low - about 8/- a week at Seend or Stapleton in 1795 for example. In Roger Wells' estimation, the rural labourer of the 1790s occupied 'the most depressed sector of the English working classes'[11]. Employment on the land had been in decline for some years as more and more commons were

9. Eden, State of the Poor, Vol 3, p.782 & Vol 2, p.643.
10. Rev Richard Warner, Excursions from Bath (Bath 1801), p.163. For Thelwall see Monthly Magazine, January 1800.
11. Roger Wells, 'The Development of the English Rural Proletariat and Social protest, 1700-1850' in R Wells and M Reed, Class Conflict and Protest in the English Countryside, 1700-1880 (London 1990), p.34. Wells rather overlooks the informal earnings of agricultural labourers via cheap (or easily stolen) provisions in his portraiture of rural distress.

enclosed and smaller farms were consolidated[12]. Enclosure came relatively late to the chalk uplands of south east Wiltshire, with about 50% of the land unenclosed as late as 1794. The Wiltshire agriculturalist, Thomas Davis, commenting unsympathetically on shifting patterns of employment due to an escalation of enclosure after that date, predicted:

> No hands will be thrown out of employ but such as are unnecessary, and such as are uselessly employed in agriculture are of no real service to the community and would be much better disposed of in manufactories[13].

The problem however was that manufacturing outlets in Wiltshire were predominantly connected to the woollen trade - a contracting industry that was itself laying workers off through mechanisation. The shortfall in agricultural employment and the consequent drift away from the land was hastened in the 1790s by the effects of

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12. The social effects of enclosure remain a contentious historical issue however. The Hammonds' view of enclosure as an unequivocal agent of distress was revised in the 1940s by J D Chambers, whose case study of Nottinghamshire found no evidence of consequential population decrease and argued on the contrary that improvement brought new workers to the countryside as hedgers and ditchers etc. It is true that enclosed commons did not always fall under the control of a single landlord, but purchasers might as easily be absentee speculators or consolidators as local small farmers, and consolidation was certainly considered a growing and threatening trend in farm management by Wiltshire labourers. See for example their petition to the Lord Lieutenant in 1795, Courier, 6/12/1795. For an overview of the enclosure controversy see Michael Turner, Enclosures in Britain, 1750-1830 (London 1984).
13. Thomas Davis, The Agriculture of Wiltshire (London 1813), p.48.

inflation on the poor rates. As the rates spiralled upwards, many landowners who had traditionally borne the burden of them transferred the cost onto their tenant farmers whose response was to rationalise their workforce.

Demand for labour was itself rather less in Somerset than in other parts of the country because dairying, the dominant agricultural practice, was not labour intensive[14]. Male farmworkers in the south of the county were paid no more than a shilling a day in the winter of 1795 or 1/4d in the summer when they were expected to work a twelve-hour shift. Women could expect only half that[15]. Despite an absence of strong agricultural unionism, farm labourers were not as incapable of striking for better wages as is sometimes supposed. They struck for an advance to 9/- a week at Wilcot, Wiltshire in 1790; at Henbury north of Bristol in 1796; at Winterslow, Wiltshire in 1799 (again for 9/-); and at Bishopstone, Wiltshire in 1800[16]. Although Wiltshire's

14. Eden, State of the Poor, Vol 3, p.794 & Vol 2, p.209; Roger Wells, 'Tolpuddle in the Context of English Agrarian Labour History', J Rule (ed), British Trade Unionism 1750-1850. The Formative Years (London 1988), pp.101-4; S Pole, Crime, Society and Law Enforcement in Hanoverian Somerset (Ph.D Thesis, Cambridge 1983), pp.22-3.
15. John Billingsley, A General View of the Agriculture of the County of Somerset, with Observations on the Means of its Improvement, (Bath 1797), p.259. These wages had been advanced by about a third in 1797, however. Farm wages in the north east of the county ranged from 7/- a wwek to 9/- a week (for harvesting), p.152.
16. Bath Chronicle 14/5/1790; Bristol Mercury 20/6/1796; Assi 24/43, Western Circuit Process Book, Wilts Lent Assize 1799; WRO A1/110/1801, Wilts Quarter Session

labourers earned a similar wage to those in Somerset, the county's limited economic base - basically sheep, wheat and cloth - inflated market prices for other commodities (coal, meat, butter, cheese etc.) especially in the south east of the county where a labourers wage was considered approximately 10% lower in real terms than in the Shepton Mallet district of Somerset[17]. In Richard Warner's opinion, rural discontent would largely evaporate if landowners could be persuaded to spend more time on their estates and take a more charitable interest in the conditions of their labourers. For then

> The murmur of discontent... which rolls like muttering thunder round the land, and seems to threaten an approaching storm, would be changed into the song of joy, or be hushed in the quiet of domestic peace[18].

Piecework

Although the Bristol shoemakers had made their opposition to piecework clear during the 1796 strike, they had not fought for its replacement by a weekly wage. This was an issue taken up by the city's journeyman tailors while the shoemaking wage strike was still on. Piecework, common throughout many of the artisan trades and especially in the weaving sector, was widely resented for the poor security it afforded to workers. As Eden found,

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Rolls January 1801, Information of J Turner & P Andrews, Nov 1800.

17. T Davis, op cit.,p.213.
18. Rev Richard Warner, Excursions from Bath (Bath 1801) p.242.

> Let any person go to Bradford or Frome, to Sheffield or Manchester, and ask a journeyman manufacturer what his labour produces, and he will answer - the usual wages of weavers etc are so much per week; and so much by the piece-work; but that the annual or weekly earnings by the piece-work are extremely irregular and uncertain[19].

Unskilled labourers at Frome could earn little more than 7/- a week if they took day wages, and could expect almost double that amount if they accepted piecework, but only by working for most of their waking hours[20]. The system enabled workers to earn enough to live on under normal circumstances whilst keeping their masters' costs to a minimum. The advent of machinery devalued the cost of piecework to many families in outlying villages to such an extent however that at Seend in 1796 it was believed women workers were able to earn only 2/6d a week if they worked continuously - or 1/- a week if they had families to look after as well. A typical labouring family could then expect to bring in no more than 14/- a week in total when their weekly minimum budget for bread alone was 11/-[21]. Bristol's shoemakers complained that piecework regularly left them idle with no work coming to them from their masters and, consequently, no pay either[22].

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19. Eden, State of the Poor, Vol 1, p.604.
20. Eden, op cit., Vol 2, p.643
21. Eden, op cit., Vol 3, p.796.
22. Bristol Gazette 24/3/1796.

For the Somerset agriculturalist John Billingsley, the attraction of piecework lay in its discouragement of idleness. The wage rises of 1792 had, in Billingsley's view, been greeted by many workers as an excuse to cut the number of days they worked in a week. Workers on daily wages worked too slowly and produced too little:

> No practical man will deny that where daily labour prevails, a considerable portion of the day is wasted in sauntering, holding tales, and in the sluggish use of those limbs which are capable of more lively motion.

Billingsley's own ploughmen in the more modernised north east of the county were all hired as contract labour, although the wage system still prevailed strongly in the south[23].

A tailor's take-home pay at Bristol during the 1796 scarcity was unlikely to exceed 10/- a week. The journeyman's claim for a further 6d a day in March was rejected by the masters who retorted that there was no shortage of piecework available and that

> this is not only the best mode of ascertaining the value of a journeyman's labour but will, if he is clever and industrious, earn him considerably more than his present demand on the master tailor by way of a weekly wage.

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23. John Billingsley, A General View of the Agriculture of the County of Somerset, with Observations on the Means of its Improvement (Bath 1797), p.102.

Piecework was a system which would 'reward every man according to his merit'. The tailors responded by alleging that piecework was a by-word for shoddiness:

> We well know a discerning public will never suffer it for these reasons: when a man works by the day, duty is done both to the customer and the employer; when done by the piece, the employer receives every advantage that hurry can give him, the customer every disadvantage from the work being slighted.

In London, and even at some shops in Bath, they maintained, piecework had been largely abolished in the tailoring trade[24]. The strike over piecework at Bristol was a long one (at least two months) and bitterly fought, but its result is unrecorded.

Machinery

The west country woollen industry was vast and labour intensive, and it played a major role in the economy of the region. At Shepton Mallet in 1790, for example, it was claimed that 4,000 people owed their livelihoods to it and a third of the population of Frome in 1797; there were as many as 60 small finishing factories at Chippenham in 1790 and 30 in Warminster. Adrian Randall has estimated that 10% of the adult male workforce in the

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24. Sarah Farleys Bristol Journal 26/3/1796 & 2/4/1796; Bristol Gazette 31/3/1796

west of England was employed in the scribbling process alone[25].

In contrast to the weaving industry in Yorkshire, the south western trade was owned and controlled by a handful of wealthy gentlemen whose power and influence was often insurmountable to the aspiring small master. The paternalistic, almost squirearchical attitudes of some of them[26] and the fact that the trade was in recession will both have been factors in minimising wage disputes. In the 1790s and early nineteenth century, weavers combined to resist machinery, changes in apprenticeship regulations, and the employment of discharged servicemen, but rarely unsatisfactory wages - indeed, as already stated, many weavers were paid relatively well.

Labour-saving machinery, introduced by the clothiers in an effort to make local industry more competitive against expansion in northern England, was perceived by the weavers as a direct threat to their employment. The threat of displacement through mechanisation now made wage-bargaining virtually impossible - a dramatic change from the situation fifty years earlier when woollen

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25. J E Fairbrother, A History of Shepton Mallet (Shepton Mallet 1872), p.14; J J Daniell, The History of Chippenham (Chippenham and Bath 1894), p.91; Adrian Randall, Before the Luddites, p.76; J J Daniell, The History of Warminster (London 1879), p.130. John Billingsley, op cit., p.159.
26. For instance, clothiers at Melksham and Chippenham donated money, meat and broth to poor weavers during the harsh winter of 1794: Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 22/2/1794.

workers in the south west established a reputation for vigorous pay demands[27].

Weavers had been organising resistance to the Spinning Jenny since its first introduction at Shepton Mallet in 1776, and to the flying shuttle since it was introduced at Trowbridge in 1785. The 1790s brought further pressures for the installation of these and other innovations; carding machines at Bradford in 1791, and combing machines at Bradford and Twerton by 1793[28]. The effects of mechanisation could be devastating. The introduction of jennies at Melksham in 1796 for example, appears to have decimated the village out-work economy of its satellite villages, a point poignantly recorded by Eden[29]. Thomas Davis, considered the scarcity of spinning work for women and children the most salient factor in the 'wretched condition' of Wiltshire's rural poor after the turn of the century. It was now 'almost out of the power of the village poor to live by their own industry'[30]. The importance of out-work to many poor families cut across normal trade boundaries, so that it was not weavers who marched to destroy jennies at Keynsham in 1790, but colliers. Samuel Bamford of Twerton

27. Adrian Randall, 'The Industrial Moral Economy of the Gloucestershire Weavers', J Rule, British Trade Unionism 1750-1850, The Formative Years (London 1988) pp.29-52. For the violent wage dispute at Bristol in 1729, see C R Dobson, Masters and Journeymen, p.31.
28. Bath Chronicle 18/7/1776, 28/11/1776, 21/6/1781, and 30/8/1781; Adrian Randall, Labour and the Industrial Revolution in the West of England Woollen Industry, (Ph.D Thesis, Birmingham 1979), pp.272-5;
29. Eden, op cit., Vol 3, p.802.
30. T Davis, op cit., p.215.

was disturbed by reports in 1793 that the weavers had entered into an 'agreement' with the Mendip colliers to descend upon his factory in force to destroy his new combing machines[31].

Adrian Randall has established that nine out of every ten warp spinners and thirteen out of every fourteen weft spinners faced displacement through the introduction of jennies in the south west. Threatened rioting in three Wiltshire villages in the Salisbury area was directly attributed to the scarcity of spinning work by a local magistrate, and a city pamphleteer took up the same theme in 1793, praising the 'two or three liberal manufacturers who have never adopted the machinery and continue to employ the poor' and urging the landed gentry to stave off the effects of displacement by establishing new joint-parish manufactories at their own expense[32]. A similar concern preoccupied Thomas Horner of Mells Park in 1795 when, after his name was connected with a move to install machinery in Sheppard's factories at Frome, there had been a minor 'insurrection' of weavers in the town. Horner, a conscientious squire, alarmed at the prospect of destroying the 'many years of uninterrupted friendly intercourse between me and (Frome's) inhabitants', was nevertheless convinced that machinery was vital to the survival of the west country industry. However,

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31. Salisbury Journal 7/6/1790; WO 1/1056, Bamford to Yonge 26/4/1793.
32. A Letter to the Landholders of the County of Wiltshire on the Alarming State of the Poor, (Salisbury 1793).

This declaration should by no means be made till a prior meeting of all the Clothiers, who should have entered into an agreement under a Bond of Penalty to support by a Subscription any general or individual loss... that charity and justice will demand this must forcibly strike all - t'would be inhuman to deprive them of bread[33].

By the turn of the century, output at Frome had increased, noted Richard Warner,

> but the number of people employed is diminished; the introduction of machines having lessened, in a prodigious proportion, the call for manual labour[34].

A meeting of weavers' delegates from Devon and south Somerset in 1793 resolved that the introduction of combing machinery directly threatened some 70,000 jobs across the country[35]. Although the severity of industrial decline in the woollen industry was checked by signs of expanding orders in the early to mid 1790s, and many clothiers argued forcefully that machinery would <u>prevent</u> rather than create unemployment (by reviving trade and encouraging investment), permanent recovery was threatened by the contraction of international markets as the war dragged inconclusively on. To accept labour-

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33. <u>Mells Manor Muniments</u>, Sheppard to Horner 17/1/1795 and Horner to Sheppard (copy) 15/1/1795; Manuscript notes titled 'Queries. To the Clothiers of Frome' (1795).
34. Rev Richard Warner, <u>Excursions from Bath</u> (Bath 1801) p.38.
35. <u>HO 42/25</u>, Stoppard, Norman and Sheppard to Franklin, 24/6/1793.

saving mechanisation while the war threatened the future viability of the industry would have required a massive act of faith within weaving communities. There are in fact few signs that the weavers considered machinery anything better than a terminal curse upon their independence, security and prosperity[36].

The conduct of disputes: 1. Workers

It did not escape the attention of many employers that the rise of trade union assertiveness in the 1790s was matched by a parallel expansion of workers' friendly societies. This was partly a direct result of the 1793 Act encouraging friendly societies to register with the County bench and have their legal status and funds protected by law in return. Friendly societies could be seen by employers as a positive force in keeping down the poor rates, and of encouraging workers' self-help and thrift to stave off some of the effects of unemployment. John Billingsley believed his argument that wage rises had 'increased the dissolute manners of the poor' was substantiated by the corresponding rise in poor rates from £50 to £200 a year in many parts of Somerset. Not

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36. J De L Mann, The Cloth Industry in the West of England from 1640 to 1880 (Oxford 1971), pp.133 & 135-6. See also the pro-machinery remarks of Lord Loughborough in his summing up at the trial of the Bradford rioters in 1791; Bath Chronicle 18/8/1791. For an agriculturalist's view of the risks of mechanisation during wartime, see John Billingsley, op cit., p.161-2. Billingsley's concern was, of course, the flooding of the labour pool in nearby agricultural areas by displaced weavers.

only were workers neglecting to save money against the possibility of hard times ahead, but they had abandoned the 'pride' that once dissuaded them from claiming relief at all.

> This pride, I am sorry to say is totally lost and the boon is now administered by the parish officer with caution and reluctance and received by the poor with dissatisfaction and ingratitude.

The collapse of deference and complete abandonment of self-help could only be averted, Billingsley argued, if workers were made to join a Friendly Society[37].

However, such societies were also seen as potentially dangerous and secretive associations of workers through which strikes could be planned and financed and which, as the Board of Agriculture suggested, afforded 'commodious opportunities to foment sedition'[38]. The 1793 Act was therefore designed to exert a measure of control over the societies by regulating their rule books and encouraging the inclusion of loyalist and patriotic clauses[39]. It remained, of course, entirely in the hands of the officers of the society to enforce compliance with the rule book! But the Act at least enabled magistrates and employers to monitor the spread of all those friendly societies attracted by the enticement of a licence. Eden was able to report the existence of nine or ten at

37. John Billingsley, op cit., pp36-38.
38. Quoted by R A Leeson, Travelling Brothers (London 1979), p.98.
39. Bath Journal 20/1/1794. See also Rules and Orders of the Bath Loyal True Britons (Bath 1794).

Bradford, one each at Seend and Minehead and eight at Trowbridge (three of them women's' societies) in 1796[40]. What the Act could not do was regulate those societies which chose not to offer their rules for judicial approval, a matter which increasingly concerned central and local authority as the decade wore on. In 1801, the Treasury Solicitors sent a circular letter to provincial authorities requesting lists of all those societies registered under the Act. The town clerk of Bristol replied that there were as many as thirty-two, but that he was unable to give the true figure because there were 'a great number of others who have never complied with the Act of Parliament and... their rules have never been confirmed'[41].

Direct links between friendly societies and industrial disputes are not easy to prove, but the fact of their predominance amongst the tramping artisan trades and the clear evidence that well-organised and financed strikes were most common amongst those same trades in the 1790s, suggests the fears of government were not unfounded. The tactics adopted by striking journeymen in the service sector were to some extent pre-determined by pragmatic considerations. In a wage or piecework dispute, crowd mobilisation was often impractical and purposeless; it was not simply a question of destroying or removing a

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40. Eden, op cit., Vol 2 p.647; Vol 3 pp.782, 794 & 800.
41. Worrall to Treasury Solicitors 13/5/1801, Town Clerk's Letter Boxes, 1801 box, Bristol City Record Office.

piece of offending machinery, and in towns like Bath or Bristol with a very mixed economic base, workers in a particular trade did not always amount to an easily discernible 'crowd'. The greatest threats to the effectiveness of the journeymen's action were the importation of blackleg labour and the loss of public support in the locality. Trade organisation and solidarity, expressed through the tramping system and effectively protected by the Friendly Societies Act, did not pass horizontally between trades, but vertically within the parameters of a particular craft. The tramping system provided avenues for communication between workers in neighbouring towns, and Friendly Society funds (or separate funds established on a similar model) provided the means by which a dispute could be favourably advertised in the provincial press, or even pursued through the courts.

The artisan trades made effective and frequent use of newspaper insertions to canvas public support by promoting the 'reasonableness' of their case; and to appeal to workers in other towns not to answer advertisements for blackleg labour from beleaguered employers. By presenting themselves as respectable, industrious and temperate in their requests for fair pay, the journeymen could appeal for public support and encourage the boycotting of employers who refused to come to terms. Newspaper insertions were sometimes used therefore before any dispute as such had begun, and

simply to make public the journeymen's 'request' for an advance. The journeyman masons of Bristol for example, allowed their wage claim of 1796 to enter the public forum via the local press. Soliciting the 'general consent' of their masters for an advance 'which we trust you will not have any objection to from the exorbitant price of provisions and evry other article of life', the masons reminded their readers of their 'many dangerous undertakings' and their subjection to the uncertainty of seasonal employment[42].

The city's tilers and plasterers had adopted an identical approach in April 1792, and met with a mixed response, some employers complying but others not. In December they followed up with a further, but more sternly worded advertisement, ending: 'We now give this notice, that we expect an advance to take place the 25th March next'[43]. The journeymen were here allowing a whole year for negotiation, and apparently before taking strike action. Disputes were not entered into lightly or easily by many workers, and indeed journeymen were not undisposed to using the media to praise those masters who treated them well. The Bath ironmonger George Stothert was publicly thanked by his journeymen smiths in 1793 for 'voluntarily lessening the time of labour by ONE HOUR each day' - although this accolade was almost certainly intended to camouflage a suggestion that smiths' hours should be

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42. Bonner & Middleton's Bristol Journal 16/4/1796.
43. Felix Farley's Bristol Journal 8/12/1792.

reduced elsewhere too ('They hope so humane an example may be followed by other masters of the trade')[44].

When their claim for an advance was rejected in 1792, the Bath journeyman shoemakers used the newspapers to encourage the public to boycott their masters. Threatening to publicly disclose the high profits being made through under-paying workers and over-charging customers, the journeymen declared,

> The Masters are left to answer to their customers and the public for charging as high prices as are paid in any part of Europe, when they refuse to pay their workmen wages much inferior to what is given in every principle trading town in Britain.

In this as well as in their 1795 and 1797 disputes, the Bath shoemakers used the newspapers to turn popular opinion against their masters, and to press for a boycott. The public were advised to shop only with the handful of named masters who had agreed the advance and who employed no blackleg labour[45].

As already stated, the secondary target audience for newspaper insertions were the men's' fellow workers in other towns - potentially the supply of blackleg labour that could break the strike. The Bath shoemakers appealed for trade solidarity and asked them not 'to assist in the

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44. Bath Chronicle 7/2/1793.
45. Bath Chronicle 29/3/1792; Bath Journal 12/3/1792 & 18/5/1795; Bath Herald 23/12/1797. The favoured masters were Haynes and Benton in 1795; Moor, Cottle, Fricker, Sidwell, Haynes & Benton in 1797.

oppression of those already too much oppressed', reminding the public meanwhile that those blacklegs already working for strike-bound masters were 'ignorant botching workmen' whose shoes would fall to pieces within months[46]. Similar adverts were taken out by the Bristol tailors in an attempt to counter their masters' efforts to import some two hundred strike-breakers in 1796. Adverts were placed inviting masters from out of town to apply to the journeymen's houses of call for labour so that those artisans who had tramped to Bristol during the strike could be enticed away[47].

Journeymen on strike were unlikely to remain in town while the dispute was on. This in itself threatened trade solidarity, because workers in neighbouring towns feared any sudden influx of labour competing with them for jobs. The Bath shoemakers union printed 500 tramping clearances for its members during the 1803/4 wages strike, and ensured they had the co-operation of the London union. Specific assurances that striking journeymen would not make the relatively short trip to Bristol in search of work had to be issued to the apprehensive Bristol union[48]. John Butler, a journeyman shoemaker at Bristol, joined the Bath union during the 1797-8 strike and was sent a list of blacklisted masters. Such was the commitment of the striking union to public respectability

46. Bath Journal 12/3/1792; Bath Chronicle 29/3/1792.
47. Sarah Farley's Bristol Journal 9/4/1796; Bonner & Middleton's Bristol Journal 16/4/1796.
48. See A Aspinall, The Early English Trade Unions (London 1949), pp.77-9, quoting Home Office papers.

however, that it published a letter denying all knowledge of Butler and condemning his behaviour when he was arrested for stealing leather from a Bristol master[49].

Violence was rarely recorded during disputes in the artisan journeyman trades. Striking artisans were generally careful not to give the authorities or the public reason to treat them as 'common' mob-rioters, and produced assurances like that of the Bristol shoemakers in 1796 that 'we mean to behave ourselves in a peaceable, loyal and becoming manner'[50]. However, there were allegations of assaults upon blackleg workers during the 1792 staymakers' strike at Bath, and vandalism to a master tailor's windows. In fact, the Bath tailoring trade had a history of minor violent confrontations during disputes; the most recent occurring in 1784 when a journeyman was prosecuted for 'presenting a pistol' to a strike-breaker and threatening to shoot him and 'all the men who worked under price like rabbets'. Other blacklegs were allegedly assaulted and beaten with sticks if they chose not to accept a pay-off from the union to leave town[51]. In three out of the four recorded strikes of agricultural labourers (see above), there are intimations that coercion by the crowd, if not actual violence, was used to ensure maximum participation. It was also alleged

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49. Bath Herald 23/12/1797.
50. Bristol Gazette 24/3/1796.
51. Bath Herald 30/6/1792, 8/7/1792, 16/7/1792 & 23/7/1792; Bath Journal 13/7/1792; George Papers, indictment vs. William Sloan and others, 1784, Bath Guildhall Record Office.

by the County bench that 'many persons have been stopped upon the various roads leading through Kingswood and money extorted from them by force' during the colliers' dispute of 1795, and that men who wanted to work were being 'forced from their employment'[52].

But overt violence was sometimes rejected in favour of the symbolic gesture of 'rough music'; a theatrical way of shaming or threatening recalcitrant employers. This practice was well established. Just as Bristol's weavers had paraded and burned the effigy of their master during a dispute in 1732, so Bath's carpenters burned James Goodridge in effigy outside his house following the circulation of a rumour that he intended to lower their wages[53]. A man who made and installed a number of labour-saving wheels for broad-cloth looms in Dilton Marsh and Westbury in 1795 suffered far greater humiliation. Dragged from his home by a crowd of weavers, he was carried around the village on their shoulders and made to dismantle and destroy every wheel he had installed. He was then chased, ducked in the river and pelted with mud, but otherwise left unharmed. The indictment against three of his tormentors alleges he was almost drowned in the

52. The Kingswood colliers had collected strike funds in this way during an earlier dispute in 1738. Robert Malcolmson, 'A set of ungovernable people: the Kingswood colliers in the eighteenth century', in J Styles and J Brewer (eds), An Ungovernable People: The English and their Law in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries (London 1979), p.114; Bristol Mercury 18/5/1795.
53. J Barry, The Social Life of Bristol 1640-1775, (Ph.D thesis, Oxford 1985), p.321; Bath Herald 16/7/1796: Bath Chronicle 21/7/1796.

river rather than simply ducked, but other evidence points to the conscious rejection of serious violence. Some members of the crowd had wanted to destroy the man's house for instance, but this was emphatically ruled out by the majority[54].

The conduct of disputes in the weaving and mining sectors was often markedly different from those in the mixed artisan trades. Weavers and miners were able to organise not only as trades, but as whole communities; a factor which gave them a bargaining strength unknown to workers in towns with a more diverse economy. Their identity as a single-trade crowd at food-price, tithe, or industrial disturbances was frequently noted by magistrates and newspaper correspondents[55]. Weavers did not simply strike against machinery; they destroyed it. Threats were regularly issued to master clothiers in a manner quite alien to the negotiated process of dispute usually adopted in shoemaking or tailoring. The Shepton Mallet clothier, William Jenkins for instance, was visited by arsonists in 1793 and again in 1799 when he tried to install finishing machines at his scribbling mills,

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54. WRO A1/110/1796, Wilts Quarter Sessions rolls, Jan 1796, information of I Wheeler. The incident is a varient of the 'traditional' West Country rough music of 'cool-staffing' - the fixing of an unpopular man to a long pole, parading him, and finally ducking him - common in weaving communities throughout the century. See John Rule, The Experience of Labour in Eighteenth Century Industry (London 1981), p.187.
55. See for example, Rooke's description of 'the Kingswood Colliers' and the Chronicle's of 'the Mendip colliers'; HO 42/29, Rooke to Dundas 13/3/1794 and Bath Chronicle 28/4/1796.

despite successfully breaking up a combination in 1790 and sporadic requests for an armed military guard on his factories. In 1800 he ascribed his inability to install shearing frames or gig mills to the strength of workers' opposition[56]. Many clothiers who introduced machinery believed themselves in constant danger of attack 'where not only the property but the lives of our people will be subject to the lawless depredation of a most desperate set of rioters'. Strike-breakers were equally intimidated: 'there will be no Mercy shown But you will be treated with the utmost Riger and Severity And Beware of being out at Night'[57], ran a threatening letter found during the 1788 dispute at Trowbridge.

Adrian Randall believes the Somerset and Wiltshire weavers demonstrated a parallel concern for public support and professed respectability[58], but the frequency of their recourse to tactics of direct action suggests otherwise. It is true that weavers were not averse to petitioning or invoking the law against machinery, for they petitioned parliament unsuccessfully against the introduction of spinning jennies in 1776[59]. When the shearmen used an old and obsolete law against gig mills

56. Ken Rogers, Warp and Weft: The Somerset and Wiltshire Woollen Industry (Buckingham 1986), pp.77-8.
57. WO1/1054, Bamford to Yonge 5/2/1792 and anonymous letter reprinted in Salisbury Journal 10/11/1788. The newspapers, War Office and Home Office files contain many more examples of threatened or actual crowd violence by weavers; see also Adrian Randall, Labour and the Industrial Revolution...(thesis, op cit.), pp272-81.
58. Adrian Randall, ibid., p.327.
59. J De L Mann, op cit., p.124.

to bring Samuel Cook to the Wiltshire assize in 1796 for introducing raising machines at Marlborough, the judge ruled the law irrelevant to the case[60]. Randall himself suggests the law had only been used on this occasion because Marlborough was too far away from the Trowbridge shearmen's sphere of influence for direct action to be a viable alternative[61]. But occasional petitions and law suits do not prove that the weavers were overtly concerned to carry public opinion outside their own communities. There is a noticeable absence of those 'consumer-friendly' newspaper insertions so familiar in disputes concerning other trades. Even a rare example from 1776, in which the weavers graciously agreed to permit their employers to run machines for a two-month trial period, seemed designed to belittle the masters' sense of control over their own property and to re-affirm that 'the dangerous consequences which WE have apprehended may evidently appear'[62]. The frequently published threatening letters sent by weavers to their employers throughout the 1790s were not only a feature completely unknown in shoemaking or tailoring disputes; but evidence of a vastly different cultural outlook upon workplace relations. Threatening letters display none of the articulate and deferential language so often employed by urban journeyman artisans. Consider for example the message sent to the clothier Paul Newman at Melksham in 1796:

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60. Bath Herald 23/7/1796.
61. Adrian Randall, Before the Luddites, p.128.
62. Cited in J De L Mann, op cit., p.124.

...you and yours shall be in flames you house and machinery before you are two months longer We are determined to do it and the rest of your Neighbours shall share the same fate if ever we catch them out a Town we will wait upon them and make them rue the day that ever they was borned for they nor you shall never tell who hurted them[63].

I have found no indications that the Somerset and Wiltshire weavers actively courted wider public support at any stage in the 1790s. For a trade group of such formidable collective bargaining power, such considerations may have seemed an unnecessary luxury. Their rebuttal at the Salisbury assize in 1796 demonstrated the poor protection weavers could expect from laws supposedly framed in their favour; a lesson forced home most severely between 1802 and 1809 when, faced with a further legal challenge to the introduction of gig mills, clothiers from three western counties combined to petition and lobby parliament for the repeal of all regulatory legislation. This protracted legal engagement may have taken seven years to reach a conclusion, but it was the masters and not their men who were to emerge the victors[64].

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63. Bristol Mercury 31/10/1796.
64. John Belcham, Industrialisation and the Working Class: The English Experience 1750-1900 (Aldershot 1990), p.61; J De L Mann, op cit., pp.142-3. Frome weavers did turn to the public for support in 1823 when their employers attempted to reduce their wages at a time of high unemployment and industrial recession. The press promoted their cause and particularly the related campaign against truck,

Colliers, like cloth workers, lived in communities where work and social experience was shared by a majority of the population. Their ability to mobilise large crowds in their support assured them a similarly enviable bargaining power. This power was strengthened still further by their situation as producers of coal - an essential fuel for many other industries. The greatest fear of Captain George Munro for example, during the Kingswood miners' 1792 wage strike, was the effect it would have on the Avon metal and glass industry:

> One glass house will stop work this morning and as the colliers will suffer no coal to be brought into the city, three more will stop on Monday should this combination continue[65].

The Kingswood and Mendip colliers regarded the stoppage of coal supplies to both industrial and domestic markets as a principal weapon for settling disputes - whether over wages, tithes, or the price of food.

The 1790s were a period of rapid expansion and full employment in the Somerset coalfields and workers were not threatened by machinery. The economic situation, miners' potential grievances and their options for

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reproducing the weavers 'Address to the Gentlemen and Tradesmen of Frome' and finding it 'entitled to attention and sympathy' for its 'very temperate spirit'. Support from a wider public was made more likely by the fine imposed by magistrates against one employer for breaking an agreement and paying in truck. See Bath & Cheltenham Gazette 8/7/1823, 15/7/1823 & 29/7/1823.

65. HO 42/22, Munro to Dundas 9/8/1792.

settling them were therefore quite unlike those of the weaving districts. Direct and destructive action was a simple enough option for weavers facing unemployment through mechanisation, but not for colliers - although their capacity for machine-breaking, as a perceived necessity, may be inferred by the Kingswood men's' historical reputation as destroyers of turnpike gates[66]. Like the weavers, and unlike the shoemakers and tailors, miners were able to utilise sheer weight of numbers to mobilise crowds and threaten large-scale disorder. In 1792, the Mendip colliers' wage dispute was an extraordinarily uncompromising and quickly settled affair. Pit heads were blockaded and a strict embargo placed on the movement of all coal until their demands were met. At the same time, a crowd reported to be 4000 strong marched from Timsbury, Paulton and Radstock towards Frome and was met by a delegation of pit owners and the High Sheriff. Their demands were immediately acceded to and violence, although feared by the authorities, was not offered[67]. Miners were well aware of

66. See Robert Malcolmson, 'A Set of Ungovernable People: The Kingswood Colliers in the Eighteenth Century', in J Brewer and J Styles (eds), An Ungovernable People: The English and their Law in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries (London 1979), pp.93-113. The colliers had become notorious for destroying turnpikes between 1727 and 1750.
67. Sarah Farley's Bristol Journal 25/8/1792; Felix Farley's Bristol Journal 18/8/1792. If the crowd was really 4000 strong, at least 50% of them must have been either miners' wives or sympathisers from other trades, for the whole coalfield employed just under 2000 men and boys in 1795: S Jackson, 'Population Change in the Somerset/Wiltshire Border Area 1701-1800', Southern History, 7 (1985), p.121; and J Benson, British Coalminers in the Nineteenth Century (Dublin 1980), p.217. For fears of violence

their reputation for lawlessness and rough 'ungovernability'[68] and may have exploited the apprehensions of disorder harboured by the authorities and their employers to win speedy settlements. Mendip's colliers were after all, in Hannah More's opinion, 'savage and depraved... brutal in their natures and ferocious in their manners'[69]. In 1780, what Bath's magistrates feared most about Gordon rioting was the deep involvement of crowds from nearby collieries. John Caldwell urged the removal of all prisoners from Bath gaol to

> some other town where there are troops constantly, for the colliers are a very numerous, desperate body of men and it be the only method to avoid having a contest with them[70].

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see troop movements catalogued in HO 42/21, Le Marchant to Dundas 15/8/1792; WO1/1053 Le Marchant to Yonge 15/8/1792 & 28/8/1792; & Bristol Corporation Letter Book, J Noble to Dundas 13/8/1792.

68. This phrase was chosen by Robert Malcolmson to describe the popular image of the Kingswood miners: R W Malcolmson, 'A set of ungovernable people: the Kingswood colliers in the eighteenth century' in J Brewer and J Styles (eds), An Ungovernable People: The English and their Law in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries (London 1979). It could be applied equally well to the Somerset men.
69. Quoted in Francis A Knight, The Heart of Mendip (London 1915), p.146. More's language was almost certainly coloured by her evangelical determination to portray the colliers as unenlightened savages in need of salvation and Sunday Schools. More's Mendips were primarily a playground for missionaries who exploited the colliers' reputation to suit theological ends.
70. SP 37/21, Caldwell to Lord Hillsborough, 11/6/1780.

The Conduct of Disputes: 2. Employers & Magistrates

Whilst it is true that the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800 brought clarity and simplification to industrial law, they signalled no sudden shift towards repression. The significance of the Acts was that they abolished the protracted requirements of jury trials, made general much anti-union legislation that had formerly been trade-specific, and specified the responsibilities of employers rather than magistrates in bringing prosecutions against workmen[71]. Certainly, there had been no coherent or unified response from either employers or the civil authorities to the serious strike-wave of 1792, when the question of responsibility proved a key one at Bristol and elsewhere. The city's military commander, George Munro, was afraid that nothing would be done to prevent the spread of strikes for

> they have hitherto met with no opposition from the magistrates of the County of Gloucester, nor has the

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71. Under the 1799 Act, prosecutions for combination could result in three month sentences on the evidence of a single witness and before two justices sitting alone. See J V Orth, 'The English Combination Laws Reconsidered' in Hay D and Snyder F (eds), Labour, Law and Crime: An historical perspective, (London 1987), p.125. In practice, the responsibility for bringing prosecutions had always seemed to rest with employers rather than magistrates. It was, for example, the master tailor Fortunatus Hagley who brought charges against his striking journeymen at Bristol in 1792. Magistrates were most unlikely to interfere with industrial relations without being called upon specifically to do so by employers. Orth rather implies that the opposite was the case before 1799. See Felix Farleys Bristol Journal, 15/5/1792 for Hagley and 18/8/1792 for the charge that it was up to the employers to prosecute striking shoemakers later in the year.

> Corporation of this City apparently taken any measures to counteract this alarming combination[72].

By and large, the civil power understood their role to be the maintenance of public order and rarely interfered in workplace disputes as long as they remained peaceful. Employers and their allies could therefore expect military intervention if they were able to portray strikers as potential rioters - which, as the surviving correspondence so clearly demonstrates, was precisely what happened in any disputes concerning colliers or weavers. Colliers were confronted by troops in 1792 and 1795 for instance on a suspicion that they might 'commit depradations etc' although as it turned out 'the colliers continue assemblies but are not riotous'[73]. The peaceful nature of the 1792 wage strike gave troops no opportunity to intervene and brought the pit owners no satisfaction from the magistrates who were, in any case, often uneasy about mobilising troops for fear of escalating discontent and creating public sympathy for the strikers. The mayor of Bristol responded to requests by mustering troops in 1792 but prefaced his decision with an anxious note to the Home Secretary:

> To prevent any confusion from the report of the military aid being requested - I write this letter in the most private manner and earnestly request it may be as private in your office[74].

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72. HO 42/21, G Munro to Dundas, 9/8/1792.
73. See for instance HO 42/29, Haynes to Rooke 13/3/1795 and WO1/1053 Le Marchant to Yonge 15/8/1792.
74. J Noble to Dundas 13/8/1792, Bristol Corporation Letter Book.

The masters chose to resolve the 1792 coal strike so speedily and so compliantly because doing so prevented disorder and economic loss through sabotage and blockade and because they knew the expense could be borne by their customers. As suppliers of an essential raw material rather than a luxury consumer product, the mine owners lost no time in granting the increase and then advancing the price of coal by a halfpenny per bushel and coke by a penny. This was 'nearly 15% though the advance in wages was comparatively small'. Indeed, the masters' profit was assured when 'the wages were reduced to their former standard within the space of a year but the advance on the coal still remains'. There was a further price increase in January 1795[75]. A reader of the Bath Register complained that the practice of raising prices to pay for wage demands was becoming widespread, self-defeating since it fuelled a general inflation of commodities, and seriously disadvantageous to poor consumers at the end of the chain. Bath's master shoemakers had settled their own 1792 dispute by increasing the price of shoes by 6d a pair, precipitating a corresponding rise in the price of skins from butchers to curriers and of leather from curriers to shoemakers. Bristol's master bakers railed at the injustice of the assize of bread which regulated the price of their product and effectively prevented them

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75. Bath Journal 27/8/1792; correspondent in Bristol Mercury 26/1/1795.

from transferring the cost of wage demands to the consumer[76].

Military intervention was resorted to during the 1795 and 1801 colliery strikes at Kingswood, not because the men had become violent but because their action was a direct and determined attempt at food price regulation during acute scarcity, set against the background in 1801 of the hangings at Taunton a few days earlier of two 'food rioters' and the county authorities' resolve to steadfastly resist the miners' demands for 'moral economy' interventionism. The magistrates therefore took a more active role in crushing the strike than the pit-owners[77], dispensing handbills amongst the colliers reminding them that their families were suffering from the loss of their wages, breaking the morale of the Coalpit Heath men, and ordering a military guard for them when they broke ranks and returned to work. Kingswood strikers who turned out to picket the Coalpit Heath mines were repulsed and dispersed by the cavalry and two of their number arrested. The strikers capitulated two days later but only after the magistrates offered additional relief to all those in work, and just as prices began to fall in Bristol market[78]. Troops were used in the earlier 1795 dispute after strikers began forcing passers-by to

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76. Bath Register 22/9/1792; Sarah Farley's Bristol Journal 18/8/1792.
77. The magistrates rather than the pit-owners were, after all, the targets of the 1801 strike because of their traditional role as market regulators. The colliers had no quarrel with their employers.
78. HO 42/61, J A Small to Portland 14/4/1801.

contribute to the strike fund. Seizing the opportunity to effect arrests without using 'difficult' combination or conspiracy legislation, they published a 'wanted' list of seven strike-leaders for highway robbery (a capital offence). Simultaneously they threatened the rank and file with identical treatment, whatever the circumstances, if they continued to take part in the strike. If any collier

> suffers themselves to be forced from their employment by any persons assembling for the purpose of rioting, they will from henceforth be deemed principal and apprehended and punished accordingly[79].

Community solidarity in the coalfields was tight however, and no cases were pursued despite the naming of the seven suspects. Similar difficulties obstructed magistrates in the weaving districts. As the anonymous weaver who threatened Paul Newman at Melksham in 1796 openly boasted, 'we will wait upon them and make them rue the day that ever they was borned for they nor you shall never tell who hurted them'[80]. Although a pre-emptive strike from the Surrey Fencibles and the Berkshire Militia had effectively dispersed a large crowd of machine-breaking shearmen on the outskirts of Bath in December 1797, the few men arrested on the night were released without charge. The county magistrates

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79. Bristol Gazette 14/5/1795.
80. Bristol Mercury 31/10/1796.

concerned, John Bowen and John Strode were contented that their prisoners had been 'much frightened' by capture and interrogation and offered a reward for the subsequent capture of the strike leaders, promised protection in anonymity to all informers, and threatened publicans with the loss of their licence if they allowed union meetings on their premises. Following these stringent efforts, a Trowbridge weaver named Moon was arrested and made the scapegoat not only for the Phillips Norton, Nunney and Bath episode, but for an earlier attack on the mill at Kintbury, Berkshire - more than thirty miles from Trowbridge - and committed to the assize, but he does not appear to have been proceeded against[81].

Weaving disputes throughout the 1780s and 1790s which, unlike those involving the colliers, were frequently characterised by violent and destructive crowd action, were met with military force on a regular basis. After the short-lived 'trial period' agreement in 1776, courteous negotiation played no noticeable part in weaving disputes. Masters and workers occupied seemingly polarised and irreconcilable positions. During the sporadic strike efforts of agricultural labourers in the region, the resort of landowners and magistrates to swift military and then rather more lengthy legal means to break up combinations went hand in hand. Since agricultural workers enjoyed none of the union traditions

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81. Bath Journal 8/1/1797; Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 20/1/1798.

and organisations of the urban craft industries, the spontaneity of strike action pointed to 'snowball' crowd action as the only reliable means of enforcing solidarity. This was the perfect pretext for straightforward military and legal solutions, for charges of riot or unlawful assembly could be made to suit both. The common assumption that, unlike the situation in weaving districts, deference and paternalism still played a paramount role in worker/employer relations in the agricultural sector, and that workers were poorly organised and poorly versed in 'solidarity', meant that the courts could be used to impart exemplary justice against them in the same way that they were used against food rioters[82]. As with food rioting however, the exemplary purpose of legal action was only served whilst a recurrence of strike action remained viable or likely. Three Winterslow farm labourers, arrested and charged for their part in a brief wage strike in 1799, traversed the Lent assize and were not therefore convicted until the summer, long after the dispute had been settled. The example now to be set was not of severity but of lenience, and the three were accordingly released with nominal fines of 1/- each[83].

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82. Particularly given QS and Assize juries composed strongly of farmers. This has been established in the South East: see Roger Wells, 'Social Protest, Class Conflict and Consciousness in the English Contryside 1700-1880' in Mick Reed and Roger Wells (eds) Class, Conflict and Protest in the English Countryside 1700-1880 (London 1990), p.157.
83. Assi 24/43, Western Circuit Process Book, Wiltshire, Lent and Summer 1799.

In trade disputes where crowd mobilisation had no part to play however, some employers did use the existing statutes against combination, conspiracy and unlawful assembly to tackle individual cases and break the morale of the unions. Two cases, one against three Bristol brick-moulders (for 'breach of contract') and the other against six Bristol tailors (for conspiracy) reached court in 1792 and brought convictions against the accused, but did not result in exemplary sentencing. The brick-moulders were ordered to return to work at the old rate of pay and threatened by the presiding judge with two years hard labour at the following assize if they refused, and the tailors were excused when they agreed to publish an apology in the papers[84]. Almost simultaneously, a combination of master shoemakers who had been resisting a strike amongst their journeymen for three months by issuing vague threats to sack trade unionists and blacklist any workers who left for preferential rates of pay elsewhere, collapsed. The city newspapers, which had keenly applauded the master tailor Fortunatus Hagley for prosecuting six of his journeymen, were dumfounded at the weakness of the master shoemakers. Felix Farleys scolded them for not using the courts. If they had, it argued,

> the alarming spirit of combination which now so universally prevails in this city amongst workers of

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84. Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 14/4/1792 & 20/10/1792. See also Bath Chronicle 3/5/1792.

every description would have been completely prevented.

In Sarah Farleys estimation, the master shoemakers' failure was crucial for 'in consequence of this circumstance, other journeymen are made uneasy and threaten a combination for the like purpose'[85].

The fact was that until the passing of the 1799 and 1800 Acts, an employer's redress against strike action was complicated by the trade-specific nature of much of the legislation, the qualifying clauses in many Acts which tied employers to wage agreement mechanisms, and the difficulties of establishing a common law case of conspiracy, or unlawful assembly in the context of a trade dispute. In 1797, Bath's master shoemakers attempted to resolve a wage strike by charging eight journeymen with conspiracy and combination, but by the time the case had been traversed from the January to the April Quarter Sessions in 1798, the dispute had long since been settled and mounting expenses may have influenced the masters in their decision to drop the charges. The case may only have got as far as it did because there were strong reasons to suspect local jacobin influences amongst the strike committee[86]. As C R Dobson has pointed out, the purpose behind many

85. Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 5/5/1792 & 18/8/1792; Sarah Farleys Bristol Journal 25/8/1792.
86. Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 20/1/1798; Bath Quarter Session Rolls & Calendars 1776-1835, session dated 19/4/1798, Bath Guildhall Record Office. See below and my section on political radicalism for the jacobin dimension to this case.

prosecutions for conspiracy to combine in eighteenth century Britain was not to secure punitive punishment but to settle disputes. The journeyman clothworkers of Bradford on Avon, convicted of conspiracy to prevent the recruitment of apprentices in 1788 for example, were spared imprisonment and subjected to only minor fines at the express and well-publicised wish of their masters who emphasised their intention to serve warning against any future combinations[87]. Such difficulties and considerations persuaded many employers to adopt a diverse range of responses to worker combinations.

When the sail cloth dressers and weavers of Bristol struck work in 1792, their masters replied with a mixed bag of hostile and reconciliatory measures. Firstly, they wished to prosecute the strike leaders but were neither materially or financially confident enough to launch a prosecution despite being able to name one man, John Rhodes, as a union leader. They set up a subscription fund to pay for any prosecutions that might arise from their offer of five guineas to any worker who would inform on his fellows, but threatened Rhodes with nothing more terrible than a sacking. His associates would be reinstated if they returned to work at once, or face similar treatment. Secondly, the masters agreed amongst themselves (on pain of a £500 penalty) to lay off all the workers in every factory if ever the workers in a single

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87. Bath Journal 18/3/1788; C R Dobson, Masters and Journeymen, pp.130-133.

factory struck work again. Thirdly, although this was a wage dispute, the masters took the opportunity to forbid their journeymen to obstruct the taking on of apprentices or impose their own 'fines' upon new workers (whose need for tuition slowed a skilled journeyman down and reduced his piecework earnings). By way of reconciliation however, the masters proposed to formally regulate these 'fines' themselves at a flat rate of 2/6d; and promised to ensure that the journeymen's own children were offered first choice on future apprenticeships. Finally, whilst insisting that they would never accede to their workers' wage demands, the masters proposed to offer an extra 2d on each piece of finished cloth but banned the weavers from their customary practice of keeping the thrub (offcut) from every chain (warp)[88]. I have found no record of the outcome of this dispute, but the convoluted response of the employers does illustrate the legal difficulties they faced in trying to break combination.

These difficulties were eased by the 1799 Act, but there is no evidence that it markedly altered the approach of many employers. Although two journeymen shipwrights were convicted and imprisoned for combination at Bristol in 1800, ten apprentices who took part in the same strike were dealt with under previous legislation for disorder and misdemeanour. This may still have indicated the readiness of the powerful Society of Merchant Venturers to resist combination by one means or another in the

88. Sherbourne Mercury 3/9/1792.

encouraging climate created by the passing of the Combination Acts, but pragmatic considerations could still not be overlooked. Just two months earlier, for example, the Venturers had backed away from legal action to combat a threatened strike by dock pilots at Pill and made efforts to meet their demands. Refusal to do so would have made a damaging strike inevitable at a time when the good will of the pilots in assisting supply ships was crucial to the relief of scarcity. The imprisonment of a handful of ringleaders would not change the fact. A strike amongst bargemen on the river Tone at Taunton, Wellington and Langport in the same year was settled in the customary manner when seventeen of the accused evaded prosecution by publishing an apology in the papers[89]. The Combination Acts were used more effectively later in the decade. Thirteen Bath shoemakers were gaoled under them for three months during the strike of 1808 for example, in what the Bath Chronicle dubbed a 'salutary check upon a growing evil'[90]. Perhaps the important advantage given to the employer by the 1799 Act was the institution of summary proceedings in areas of conspiracy and combination, replacing the requirement of

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89. Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 2/8/1800 & 29/11/1800. Minute Book of the Society of Merchant Venturers, entry dated 23/6/1800 (microfilm copy, Bristol University Library). Bristol's master shipwrights had a reputation for being 'overbearing and despotic according to the radical John Gast who worked for them until the crushing of an earlier strike in 1794. This too was dealt with without intervention by the courts. See I J Prothero, Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth Century London: John Gast and his Times (London 1979), p.16.
90. Bath Chronicle 24/2/1808.

trial by jury in a far wider range of trades. Summary proceedings were relatively cheap, more certain to bring the desired conviction, and much quicker to institute - making exemplary judgements whilst disputes were still on a more attainable target.

The major disputes of the 1790s involving well organised trades like the tailors and shoemakers were settled not by court cases but by the capacity of either side to withstand a prolonged state of siege. Once both workers and masters had advertised their opposing positions in the press, the battle over blackleg labour could begin in earnest. Masters were determined to resist the intimidation of strike-breakers by the unions and often, like Bath's master staymakers in 1792, threatened to use the law to do so[91]. Once again, legal action was rare however and other methods were resorted to. To counter their striking journeymen's customary appeal for trade solidarity, the Bath master shoemakers enticed blacklegs in 1795 by offering them a rise below that being demanded by the union and promising 'protection from insult'. During the 1797-8 dispute, one Bath master even offered to secure safe lodgings for his strike-breakers and a place where they could work 'without being interrupted in their business by any of the present Society in this city'[92]. During the protracted strike of journeymen tailors over piecework at Bristol in 1796, the masters

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91. Bath Herald 30/6/1792.
92. Bath Chronicle 14/5/1795; Bath Journal 9/1/1798.

advertised for two whole months in the Bristol, Bath, Sherbourne and Gloucester newspapers for as many as two hundred strike-breakers to come into the city. The union houses of call seem to have been successful in redirecting some of these men either to other towns or to employment with those Bristol masters who had now come to terms, because the masters were forced to establish their own house of call from which they declared that 'they will never call a journeyman to work from the established houses'[93].

Work and Politics

The very fact that both political radicalism and trades unionism achieved substantial and more or less parallel growth amongst artisan and journeyman workers in the 1790s, makes the question of linkage a key one. Perhaps because the bulk of existing analysis has taken the 1799 Act as its starting point[94], the preceding years have not received the attention they deserve. It is undeniably true that radical preoccupation with trade questions or unionist concerns about political reform do not feature strongly in the surviving evidence from the South West,

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93. Bonner & Middletons Bristol Journal 16/4/1796; Sarah Farleys Bristol Journal 26/3/1796, & 9/4/1796; Bristol Gazette 5/5/1796.
94. For example, E P Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (London 1963), pp546-65; C R Dobson, op cit., pp122-3, 144; Roger Wells, Insurrection: The British Experience 1795-1803 (Gloucester 1983), p48 & 171.

but neither is there confirmation for the views of C R Dobson or M I Thomis that politics and unionism existed in largely separate spheres[95].

Linkage was certainly feared by employers and civil authorities long before the passing of the Combination Acts or the Corresponding Societies Act of 1799. The recession of the war years, and the spectre of unemployment that accompanied the introduction of machinery into the weaving industry filled many commentators with foreboding. From Wiltshire in 1793 came the apocalyptic prophesy:

> The cries of hunger will be heard - if entreaties are of no avail, they will be turned into demands; and demands and violence are usually not far distant. What apt instruments will a starving and outrageous rabble be for the enemies of our Constitution to employ! How will they misconstrue the causes that gave birth to these distresses! How will they fan the flame of insurrection and direct its fury[96].

In south Somerset that year, mill owners became suspicious when their workers met and collected funds to oppose combing machinery. Although the campaign wore 'a plausible constitutional aspect... we fear it is only a

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95. See M I Thomis & P Holt, Threats of Revolution in Britain 1789-1848 (London 1977), and Thomis quoted by R Wells in Insurrection p51; C R Dobson, op cit., p123
96. A Letter to the Landholders of the County of Wiltshire on the Alarming State of the Poor (Salisbury 1793).

cloak for some more dangerous measures as we have no such machinery for combing'[97]. A year later, the indictment against a journeyman tailor for distributing the Rights of Man at Bath laid bare the suspicions of the city magistracy towards radicalism in his trade. The tailors were

> perpetually talking and conversing on Politicks and frequently forming into Factious Parties, some for and some directly against the government; nay extending it so far as to decline or refuse to work for a Master Taylor unless he was of the same political principles as the Journeymen were - the universal theme amongst these low people being nothing but politicks - and the defendant Benjamin Bull, wandering to Bath for work, he found many of the low Journeyman Taylors and others holding and maintaining the same Political Principles as he himself held[98].

Tailoring, like shoemaking - another journeyman trade with a reputation for both industrial militancy and political radicalism - was non-physical work, organised around small workshop units which 'permitted thinking and discussion while working'[99]. This did not mean in itself, of course, that workers were bound to adopt radical

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97. HO 42/25, Stoppard, Norman and Sheppard to Franklin 24/6/1793.
98. Indictment against Benjamin Bull 1794, Philip George papers, Bath Guildhall Record Office.
99. E J Hobsbawm & J W Scott, 'Political Shoemakers'. Past & Present 89 (1980) p97-8.

principles any more than Pittite sympathies, but it should not surprise us if workers in some workshops were reading and discussing Paine and his contemporaries or becoming receptive to a radical critique. Radical propagandists spreading their ideas in public houses will have gathered an audience from whichever trade frequented them, whether as houses of call or not. The Bath shoemakers' strike of 1797-8 almost coincided with the recruitment programme of the United Britons. These were not initially related events, but the radical emissary William Bennett was reportedly frequenting public houses in the company of six journeyman shoemakers a few months beforehand

> who are much addicted to inflame and promote sedition, one or more of whom have delivered inflammatory handbills in Alehouses in Bath and have also made parole declarations in an Alehouse[100].

Four men were arrested and then released without charge following this discovery, and a further eight[101] faced conspiracy and combination charges in November during the strike. When the United Britons were revived in the spring of 1801, the Bath contact for the United

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100. HO 42/41, Jefferies to Portland 11/8/1797.
101. The number was possibly greater. An unusually high number of people (14) were arraigned and discharged for an unspecified breach of the peace at the same sessions, and one James Griffin Crosse, arrested at about the time the strike was on, was dealt with at the previous sessions for breach of the peace and sedition (damning the king). See Bath Quarter Session Rolls & Calendars January and April 1798, Bath Guildhall Record Office.

Corresponding Societies was another shoemaker, Richard Francis[102].

The independence of the tramping journeyman provided a further opportunity for the dissemination of radicalism. Benjamin Bull's indictment claimed he had tried to use an inn frequented by travelling fellow-tailors - the Red Post on the road to Radstock - to pass on further copies of the Rights of Man. Two more journeymen who claimed to be travelling through Somerset in search of work that summer were arrested on a sedition charge when it was alleged by an innkeeper at Kingweston that they had tried to recruit local men to a secret republican association. These were not lowly men. As their examining magistrate discovered, 'Both the prisoners appeared to have more information and sagacity than usually is found in persons in their situation'. Moreover, it was alleged that these journeymen lived in London where they were acquainted with LCS secretary, Thomas Hardy, had recently been in Sheffield, Southampton and Brittany, and were making for North Curry at the time of their arrest[103]. A journeyman named Spenley, 'a notorious jacobin who travels in the clothing line' caught the attention of magistrates at Bradford in 1801 because he 'endeavours to disseminate these detestable doctrines through the country while he

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102. PC1/3526, Material seized from Joseph Bacon.
103. HO 42/43 Welsh to Portland 4/8/1794; HO 42/31 Granville to Portland, examination of Meekins and Stone, 22/6/1794; Bath Chronicle 3/7/1794 & 10/7/1794.

is taking his orders etc for his employer'[104]. The authorities' fears of the tramping system were that the free movement of known radicals could not easily be controlled or their activities monitored. Moreover, the system lent itself perfectly to underground radical and trades unionist organisation in the aftermath of repressive legislation.

Adrian Randall has used his detailed work on the West of England weavers to test E P Thompson's claims for the radical politicisation of northern Luddite unionism in a South Western context. He considers radicalism to have been 'muted' there since 'there is little evidence of any organised radical presence'[105]. Indeed, the evidence is not great, but it is considerably greater than Randall's own brief checklist of sedition cases would suggest. He overlooks the evidence of political disaffection in the weaving towns of Bradford and Trowbridge supplied by the correspondence of Captain Craufurd to the Home Office in 1792, as well as the existence of corresponding societies at Trowbridge and Phillips Norton[106]. A letter to the Home Office from the Clerk of North Bradely concerning the discovery at Bradford of a 'secret association in

104. HO 42/61 anonymous letter to Addington 9/1/1801.
105. A Randall, Before the Luddites p.273.
106. HO 42/23, Craufurd to Dundas 20/12/1792 and HO 42/24, Craufurd to Dundas 22/1/1793; BL Add Ms 59308, Dropmore Papers, List of United Corresponding Societies seized at London, 1797; Bath Herald 12/1/1793 (letter concerning 'Jemmy' Jumps, the Clothing Boy' and his republican activities at Trowbridge - possibly a reference to Benjamin Hobhouse). These references are used more fully in chapter two.

favour of the enemies of this country' and of a list of disaffected people that had been sent to France, is dismissed by Randall as a mis-placed reference to the Shearmens' Union because it is 'unsubstantiated by any other source' and because it is undated but included with a bundle of letters from 1799. In fact there is a second copy of this letter in the Privy Council papers - an indication perhaps of the importance attached to it by government - which is very clearly dated April 22nd 1798. This was precisely the time at which the United Britons' emissary, Robert Watson, is thought to have smuggled a list of radical societies, delegates and secretaries to France, shortly before fleeing the country in May. The North Bradely letter is therefore quite possibly authentic[107], and Randall's scepticism unnecessary.

There is insufficient detailed evidence to definitely ascribe much of this radical activity to organised groups of weavers, but for radical societies to flourish in communities like Phillips Norton, Bradford and Trowbridge without being connected to the woollen trade would seem most unlikely. The negligence of Bowen and Strode in not investigating the political background to the shearmens' machine-breaking escapade of December 1797 (see above) was regretted by Portland who saw good reason for 'their motives as well as their conduct becoming objects of

107. Randall op cit., p.275; HO 42/46 Clerk of North Bradely to Portland (n.d.), & PC1/3118 Clerk of North Bradely to Portland 22/4/1798. Watson's list is confirmed in PC1/43/A152, information of Henry Hastings.

further investigation'. Bowen said he hoped they had not been influenced by 'another Description of People and from different motives', an appropriate enough hope since it was from Phillips Norton that the 1500 shearmen had gathered and set out[108].

Although certain cultural similarities have already been noted between coalmining and weaving communities, as well as the favourable attitude shown by both to the practice of direct action, there is no evidence of any shared outlook on political reform. The livelihoods and way of life enjoyed by colliers was under no threat in the 1790s comparable with that of the weavers; on the contrary, employment on the coalfield expanded throughout the decade just as it declined in the weaving district. Demand was huge. Bath alone received some ten waggonloads of coal a day from each of its surrounding pits in 1792, with 23 new pits being opened in the district between 1760 and 1800. In 1795 when production reached its zenith, some 2000 men and boys were directly employed in the Mendip coalfield, hewing an average 133,000 tons of coal a year[109]. As we have seen, they fought for and quickly won a wage rise in 1792. Mine owners felt no need to reduce wages during the war years, and the small-scale introduction of labour saving machinery was not resisted

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108. HO 42/41 Bowen to Portland 20/12/1797; HO 43/10 Portland to Bowen 23/12/1797.
109. Bath Herald 2/6/1792; S Jackson, 'Population change in the Somerset/Wiltshire border area 1701-1800: a regional demographic study', Southern History 7 (1985) pp121 & 131.

since it appeared to facilitate the opening of fresh seams[110]. Of course, mining communities suffered during years of scarcity along with everybody else, and colliers were not slow to mobilise in defence of the moral economy in 1795-6 or in 1800-01, and they won redress in the same way against the attempted collection of an obsolete tithe in 1795. The lack of interest they displayed in political reform was rooted in a number of factors.

Mining communities were largely rural and removed from the political culture of the major towns where weaving and other trades were concentrated. Secondly, they were subjected purposefully to the subjugatory and loyalist missionary zeal of Hannah More in Mendip, and Wesleyan methodism in Kingswood. Whilst the relative success of these ventures is open to debate, it would seem foolish to deny that they had at least some effect. Thirdly, the isolation, confident crowd strength and self-identity of mining communities nurtured a popular culture of fierce independence and inward-looking self-determination. Robert Malcolmson's much cited work on the Kingswood colliers[111] illustrates not so much 'a set of ungovernable people' as a set of 'self-governing' people - yet he appears surprised at their non-involvement in the 1831 Bristol reform riots and puts it down to the general quietism he detects in their behaviour from the

110. Bath Chronicle 15/3/1792. A new pit was opened at Timsbury in March and a steam engine installed to haul coal to the surface. Much of this work was by this time being done by horses anyway.
111. R Malcolmson, op cit., pp85-127.

latter part of the eighteenth century onwards[112]. Ivor Wilks' work on the mining communities of South Wales in the early nineteenth century offers further clues, however. In Wilks' view, the miners' rising of 1839 was Chartist only in name and in the espoused agenda of its non-mining leaders. The colliers, he contends, rose for independence rather than a changing of the guard in a remote English capital[113]. The difficulty historians face in accepting such an interpretation is embedded in the conventional notion that 'class' arises from a wedding of trades unionist and political (meaning parliamentary-reformist) aspirations. South Western mining communities do not fit comfortably into this model of class formation, although few historians would argue that miners were backward in developing class consciousness. Radicalism we may be forced to conclude, was not after all a necessary component in class development.

Weavers who saw unemployment, the loss of independence and other enforced changes in their conditions of employment as a consequence of machinery introduced in defiance of established law and natural justice, were far more likely to be receptive to Paineite notions of 'rights' and to the radical critique of corrupt government. The battle over the proprietorial and

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112. R Malcolmson, op cit., p.123.
113. Ivor Wilks, South Wales and the Rising of 1839: Class Struggle as Armed Struggle (London 1984). Wilks does not lay claim to a syndicalist interpretation of mining history, but that is the logical drift his argument takes.

economic rights of employers to install machinery in their own workshops, and the legal and moral rights of the weavers to resist it was inseparable from the growing influence upon the beliefs of ministers and businessmen of the economic ideas of Adam Smith. The moral economic tradition of a mutually binding fair contract between workers and employers, or for that matter between producers, retailers and consumers in the marketplace, was directly challenged by the innovative doctrines of laissez-faire at the close of the century. Laissez-faire confirmed and amplified the division of interests between clothiers and weavers, and in this sense at least may be said to have facilitated the consciousness of growing antagonisms at the point of production, as well as at the point of consumption as far as the legal system was concerned. We certainly see evidence of a general breakdown of deferential behaviour in the language of the weavers' threatening letters; the one sent to Paul Newman in 1796 openly mocked the concept by purporting to be from his 'Humble Servant'.

The radical societies concentrated their attack upon constitutional corruption and did not actively promote the case against machinery in the '90s, but their critique of illegitimate power may have found willing converts among weavers frustrated at the undermining of their freedoms by the manipulation of the law. The 1802 election at Chippenham for instance was fought partly over the threat represented to 'Liberty' by machinery and

the town's weavers rioted on behalf of 'Brooke and Freedom' against 'Maitland and Machinery'[114]. Whilst I would argue that Adrian Randall underestimates the interest shown in radicalism by South Western weavers, we should nevertheless be wary of drawing an equal equation with the interest shown by radicals in the trades. A recent contribution by Robert Hall to the debate about unionism and radicalism is a timely illustration. Seeking to champion E P Thompson's 'emphasis on the ties between radicalism and trade unionism in early nineteenth century England', Hall homes in on the Lancashire cotton strike of 1818. What he has actually established however, is that 'the radicals rallied to the side of the trades and sometimes served as leaders of the strikes'[115], which is not the same thing as saying that the trades adopted the radicals' programme.

The independent status of the craftsman artisan (shoemakers, tailors et al) was not significantly threatened in the 1790s but these workers too felt the bite of wartime recession and loss of earnings in the cost-cutting efforts of their masters. Their much-prized independence, characterised by an espoused 'respectability', flexible working hours, economic, social and demographic mobility and craft-centred

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114. J De L Mann, op cit., p.141 (footnote 2).
115. Robert G Hall, 'Tyranny, Work and Politics: The 1818 Strike Wave in the English Cotton District', International Review of Social History, XXXIV (1989), pp.433-470. Both quotations are taken from the summary on p.433.

cultural exclusivity, was not easily defended by industrial muscle. The lure of political influence through parliamentary reform (and even, conversely, of political and social stability through loyalism) for such workers is perfectly understandable. Since workers in these trades frequently stated their case in newspaper insertions during disputes, it is worth examining the language deployed for signs of radical thought or even the beginnings of a class-conscious position.

I have argued that industrial disputes were often conducted as polite and courteous negotiations between master and journeymen, with violent confrontation reserved for clashes amongst the journeymen themselves (strikers and blacklegs). Journeymen will sometimes have been aware that masters in certain trades (carpenters for example) were not in a position to raise wages without first securing a rise for themselves from a higher employer. The journeymens' struggle to be 'reasonable' was often genuine and a poor index to any class divide between exploitative masters and downtrodden workers. The Bath tailors struck for a guinea a week in 1802 - a sum which at least one master acceded to as 'reasonable' - but reacted angrily to the 'untrue' rumour that they had ever asked for 25/-. In 1805, the Bath shoemakers even wanted to silence an 'injurious report' that they had 'recently exacted of their respective employers an

increase in wages'. It was, they maintained, a most 'malicious insinuation'[116].

R S Neale believed Bath's journeymen to be myopic and self-interested, 'lacking any developed sense of community' and submerged within 'the precepts of the prevailing deferential ethos'. Until the 1830s, they

> fell far short of developing a consciousness of themselves as members of one whole body of workers whose interests were opposed to those of their employers as a class. Their interests and energies were circumscribed by a merely trade interest[117].

The latter statement is untrue as far as their interest in either radical or loyalist politics is concerned, but it is hard to argue with the former. Economic and social divisions between masters and journeymen became more apparent when the protracted nature of some disputes embittered relations on both sides, but the 'prevailing deferential ethos' was not often overturned. During the Bristol tailoring strike of 1796 for instance, the masters launched their own combination of resistance, blacklisted the journeymens' houses of call and attempted to draft in some 200 blackleg workers. They denounced their former workers as 'profligate' and 'indolent' but

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116. Bath Journal 26/4/1802; Bath Chronicle 2/5/1805.
117. R S Neale, Bath, a Social History 1680-1850; or a Valley of Pleasure yet a Sink of Iniquity (London 1981), pp.309 & 328.

drew little overt hatred and attracted few public insults in reply from strike leaders[118].

Deferential language was occasionally shelved during disputes in shoemaking however. The Bath journeymen pulled no punches in describing blacklegs as 'ignorant botching workmen' in 1792 and accused their masters of blatant profiteering. They also developed a radical vocabulary, making free and frequent use of the assertion that they were 'oppressed'[119]. Such phrases are explicitly non-deferential, conjuring up images of slavery (a topical concern in the Spring of 1792), despotism and tyranny, and recalling language then being used by paternalists in some sections of the newspaper press to inspire sympathy for English day labourers. 'Veritas' in the Bath Journal for instance argued that 'our own white slaves' were relatively worse off in the Spring of 1792 than those from Africa about whose condition so much public protest was then being made[120]. The 1795 dispute was marked by still more bitter exchanges. The journeymen now expressed their alienation from a growing tendency for new middling class masters to buy their way into the trade to create wealth for themselves, but who cared nothing for the traditions and customs of the trade, or for the men they employed. The

118. Sarah Farleys Bristol Journal, 2/4/1796. One master was accused of running a 'slop shop', but beyond this the journeymen concentrated on clarifying their argument against piecework: Bristol Gazette 7/4/1796.
119. Bath Chronicle 29/3/1792; Bath Journal 12/3/1792.
120. Bath Journal 27/2/1792.

'ignorance' of this new breed of master was a consequence of their 'taking it up late in life' and being 'never bred to the business'. A form of 'class' differentiation was thus opened up between master and journeyman because a breakdown of the paternal in-trade workshop unit exposed the 'us' and 'them' aspects of the relationship more clearly than ever before. The journeymen drove their point home with the old adage:

> Let the cobbler stick to his last. It is not for carpenters, barbers, coachmen, servants and the like to judge of the propriety of that which they are entirely unacquainted with[121].

The union mocked the masters' attempts to present a case to the public as inept 'blunderings' and suggested they contract 'some hireling scribbler' to do the job more coherently. In itself, this breakdown of deference between employer and worker represents no significant challenge to Neale's remarks about a 'purely trade interest', but the most interesting feature of this dispute was that the journeymen now developed the concept of 'oppression' to embrace workers other than shoemakers and to make an (admittedly) obscure comment upon wider political issues:

> It is from these and similar circumstances of oppression the present complaints of the lower orders of the people may be attributed... Cease vipers, you bite against a file[122].

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121. Bath Journal 18/5/1795.
122. Bath Journal 18/5/1795; 1/6/1795.

By and large, the political beliefs of trade unionists during the 1790s are obscured from twentieth century view by the eighteenth century requirements of 'respectability' and the smothering restrictions of government inspired censorship. The desire for self-protection amongst benefit societies tolerated under the 1793 Act ensured that overt political activity was never publicly linked to trade questions, and that - as the Bristol shoemakers put it in 1796 - journeymen in dispute conducted themselves 'in a peaceable, loyal and becoming manner'[123]. As noted in chapter two however, the progress of radicalism within the Bath artisan trades unions, particularly tailoring and shoemaking, was overt enough to be remarked upon by the authorities by 1817, and weavers from Somerset were sending delegates to the pro-radical General Union of Trades in Lancashire during the strike-wave of 1818[124].

It would also be true to say that the frequency with which eighteenth century tradesmen engaged in disputes with their masters is similarly obscured from twentieth century view. The fact that the tactics employed by the weavers were so alarming to the authorities, chargeable under law, and reportable in local newspapers, is itself the reason we know so much about the struggle over machinery and are able to describe a virtually constant

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123. Bristol Gazette 24/3/1796.
124. HO 42/181, Norris to Sidmouth, 11/10/1818.

state of hostility and conflict between masters and men. The readiness of the shoemakers and tailors to use the newspapers to publicise disputes may not have been shared by some other, perhaps less highly organised or financially comfortable craft unions. It should not be inferred therefore from the relative frequency of appearances in newspaper columns of one trade over another, that certain trades struck more often than others. In fact the shoemakers themselves did not resort to the press as a matter of course during disputes, as the 1804 strike at Bath was to show. Had it not been for central government's interference with the union's mail, the 1804 dispute would have been lost to history completely for it is not once referred to in the press[125].

We should bear in mind too that the intervention of magistrates to settle a dispute need not imply that a case was brought before Quarter Sessions and properly recorded. In some areas of employment law, even before the Combination Acts, a lone magistrate was empowered to impose or threaten fines and imprisonment in the privacy of his parlour, or in company with one other justice in petty sessions[126]. Such 'hearings' were seldom recorded

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125. See the Home Office papers reproduced in A Aspinall, The Early English Trade Unions (London 1949), pp.75-9.
126. The powers of magistrates in this respect are given general treatment by B Osborne, Justices of the Peace 1361-1848: A History of the Justices of the Peace for the Counties of England (Shaftesbury 1960), pp.203-205.

in any detail. Although the law obliged magistrates to report all summary judgements to the Quarter Sessions record, there is no guarantee that the rule was unfailingly observed - or if it was, that sufficient detail was included to identify the case as an industrial dispute[127]. Disputes that were settled with a warning rather than a judgement are even less likely to have been recorded. As with cases of sedition, one can have very little idea of the number of times the law was used in this way for the policing of employer - employee relations.

Not only must we suspect the absence of any surviving evidence for some disputes, but we should also accept that we still know far too little about daily relations between masters and journeymen and the extent to which English journeymen engaged in regular patterns of negotiation along the lines of the artisan sans culottes of Paris[128]. The following note, intercepted by the Home Office in November 1800 but preserved in its files without a word of explanation, is a case in point. It was sent from the East Mendip village of Holcombe:

> Dear friends, we are very sorry that we cannot step forwards with your proceeding at the time you

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127. Orth notes even the ommission of a case from the Lancashire sessions record that was important enough to be moved by writ of certiorari to the higher court of Kings Bench; op cit., pp.132-3.
128. See Michael Sonenscher, 'The Sans Culottes of the Year II: rethinking the language of labour in revolutionary France', Social History, 9, 3 (Oct 1984) pp.301-328.

appointed but we are getting things forward as speedy as possible. And we like very well of your plans. And will do our endeavour to follow your proposals. And I desire you to let us know how you go on with your proposals. And so no more at present,

yours James Maggin (?),

secretary for the Frome District[129].

The nature of these 'plans' and 'proposals' remains obscure. Although an attempt at unionism seems the most likely explanation for this mysterious correspondence, I have not been able to verify it as such. The chronological table of known disputes which is given in the appendix should certainly not be taken as a definitive list, nor should it be assumed that an absence of full-blown disputes meant an absence of regular and assertive negotiation. But, like the tables of scarcity-related crowd disturbances and of judicial responses to sedition, what it does clearly show is that previous attempts at quantification in this region have been under-estimates. Workplace disputes were frequent, often surprisingly protracted, and were an important and common component in the working lives of most people in the south west.

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129. HO 42/53, note dated 30/11/1800, J Maggin to ?.

Chapter Eight

Scarcity, Regulation and Direct Action: Politics and the Market-place

The seriousness of the provision scarcities in 1795-6 and 1800-01 and the suitability of terms like 'famine' to describe these crises have been debated by a number of historians[1]. 'Famine' was certainly a term used freely enough by such contemporary commentators as William Marshall[2], and it would seem clear enough that if one poor woman of Codford St Peter was reduced to crawling under a granary to grab a few peas for her dinner through a hole in the floor; and if the 'lower class of tradesmen and peasantry' of Corton Dinham were 'barely existing' on rough mixed bread and root vegetables, the depth of the

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1. For a review of the literature and a statement of the case for famine, see Roger Wells, Wretched Faces: Famine in Wartime England, 1793-1801 (Gloucester 1988), Chapter 4, pp.53-71. For a refutation of this position see Michael Turner's review of 'Wretched Faces' in Social History, 15, 3, pp.390-392, and E P Thompson's verdict that 'true famine (where there really is no stock of food) is not often attended with riot since there are few rational targets for the rioters', in Customs in Common (London 1991), p.264.
2. Marshall described almost casually 'these days of famine and taxation' in The Rural Economy of the West of England (London 1796), 2, p.220.

scarcity was both severe and appalling, whether it was a famine or not[3].

Thomas Beddoes, who visited many of the malnourished and fever-wracked poor of Bristol in the wake of these scarcities, feared massive mortalities in 1795 and noted a worsening situation in 1801:

> The number of cases was prodigious... twenty eight people lay down with fever in one house in Back Street (it is believed they had very little medical assistance), and eight were buried out of a single house in Elbroad Street[4].

There were signs of acute stress in many charitable organisations, from bread rationing at Bath hospital in 1795 to the threatened closure of the Bristol Infirmary in 1800, and an 'entire exhaustion' of funds at the Strangers' Friend relief societies in both cities[5]. Clearly dearth did not assail everybody, as the uninterrupted extravagance of Parson Woodforde's eating habits during his sojourns in Somerset in 1795 make

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3. For the woman, Anne Fry, see WRO A1/110 & 125, QS Rolls and Calendar, April 1801; for Corton Dinham see questionaire reply in HO 42/54, November 1800. The poor of Bath could be seen 'scouring the market floor for waste cabbage leaves': Bath Journal, 14/7/1800.
4. Quoted by John Latimer, The Annals of Bristol in the Nineteenth Century (Bristol 1893), p.8, quoting a letter sent by Beddoes to The Monthly Magazine. For Beddoes' warnings in 1795 see his letters to the Bath Chronicle, 7/12/1795 and 31/12/1795.
5. Bath Journal 27/7/1795; Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 5/4/1800; Bonner & Middletons Bristol Journal 5/7/1800; Bath Journal 16/3/1801.

plain[6], but nevertheless the scarcities present unquestionable evidence of a social order under stress, and they exposed to intense scrutiny the alleviating abilities of the administrative structures of John Reeves' 'happy Constitution'.

This chapter investigates some of the strengths and frailties of the political status quo which Reevesite loyalism sought to defend. Effective measures for the maintenance of public order and the regular supply of the markets were vital for the continuance of Reevesite social control and the permanent subjugation of radicalism. The scarcities were a testing ground for the strength of loyalist domination and the champions of loyalism knew this very well. Hannah More told her starving flock at Shipham in 1801 that God had sent the scarcity

> to unite all ranks of people together, to show the poor how immediately dependent they are upon the rich... It has also enabled you to see more clearly the advantages you derive from the government and constitution of this country... for I leave you to judge what would have been the state of the poor of this country in this long, distressing scarcity had it not been for your superiors[7].

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6. John Beresford (ed), Diary of a Country Parson, the Rev James Woodforde, Vol 4 1793-96 (London 1929), P.209-39.
7. A Roberts (ed), Mendip Annals; a narrative of the charitable labours of Hannah and Martha More (London 1859), pp.243-44.

The reliance of local authorities upon an informal network of Provision Committees, presided over by 'principal inhabitants' and invested with powers of disqualification from relief, invites comparison with the RAs as an agency of social control. Given the effectiveness of these networks to secure and maintain supplies of basic foodstuffs in most urban centres for fairly long periods, this chapter evaluates the response of the poor, the choices they exercised, the legitimation they felt in making those choices, and the implications of this response for the broader study of evidence for loyalism. If government's antagonism to the 'moral economy' was widely perceived as innovatory, historical assumptions about popular support for other governmental innovations - like the destruction of civil liberties - deserves reassessment.

This chapter will first consider the official and unofficial measures employed in the South West to alleviate distress: The establishment of Provision Committees, the use of the laws against marketplace malpractice, the implementation of the Assize of Bread, and the encouragement of non-customary diets.

Relief at Bristol

In 1766, during the most recent serious scarcity, Bristol's markets had remained relatively well-stocked through the steady flow of foreign imports direct to the

city port, backed by Corporation action to restrict exports out of it[8]. In 1795 however, foreign trade was severely hampered by the war, and internal supplies regularly interfered with by colliers' blockades in Kingswood and the producing districts to the North. In London, the Privy Council was inundated with requests from the provinces to send shipments of grain from port to port, and was hard pressed to meet demand. In response to repeated pleadings from Bristol Corporation, and after warning them that Bristol could expect no special treatment, the Duke of Portland directed a single consignment of grain to the port from Yarmouth. The mayor, whose local regime had just endured four days of price-rioting in the city market, requested further shipments a week later but was turned down for, 'Present circumstances render it impossible'[9]. It was clear that government intervention could not be relied upon to solve the city's problems. Limited ameliorative measures were produced by the co-operation of the Merchant Venturers and the Corporation in providing bounties for all fresh fish caught and delivered to the port; a convention repeated in 1800 at a total cost of nearly £3,000[10]. It was only once the Corporation had been disabused of their complacent assumption that port status would preserve

8. Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 9/10/1766.
9. This correspondence may be traced in HO 42/35 Smith to Portland 8/7/1795 and Minutes of the Privy Council 8/7/1795; HO 43/6 Portland to Smith 7/7/1795, 11/7/1795 & 22/7/1795, and Bristol Corporation Letter Book, Smith to Portland 10/7/1795.
10. Courier 15/6/1795, Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 10/5/1800, J Latimer, Annals of Bristol in the 19th Century, P.6.

them from scarcity that they gave financial backing to the formation of a Provision Committee in July 1795. By this date there were an estimated 15-18,000 people 'in absolute want of assistance' in Bristol; perhaps more than a quarter of the population[11]. A Committee had been running at neighbouring Bath for seven months by this time, and was canvassing for its second subscription of the year by the time the Bristol Committee was ready to sell its first consignment of cheap rice[12]. Until that time, relief had been provided in some parishes by small Committees, but with no Corporation help and no centralised co-ordination[13]. Effective organisation remained a problem however. In September, the Corporation purchased what turned out to be 'a large quantity of stale flour' for sale cheaply to the city's bakers, but neither they not the Provision Committee took any steps to prevent its being

> sold to the Factors and by them mixed with fresh flour, and sold by them to the bakers at £4.10s a

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11. Figure estimated by a correspondent in the Bristol Mercury, 13/7/1795, and citing an estimated total population of 60,000.
12. Bristol Gazette 23/7/1795; and Bath Journal 12/1/1795 for the founding of the Bath Committee.
13. Most Bristol parishes appear to have followed a lead given by the principal inhabitants of St Augustines which raised £100 in January. It was by no means unusual in the 1790s, even during relatively prosperous years, for short-term relief to be raised in this way during the coldest months. Such shemes were not intended, nor were they able, to run on into the Spring however. See Bristol Mercury 12/1/1795, and 2/2/1795 for examples. There was Corporation backing, to the tune of £500, for the Provision Committee formed in July: Bristol Mercury 20/7/1795.

> sack and the bakers assized to the first cost which... was no more than 54s a sack.

The bakers called on the mayor to establish regular market hours for the sale of freshly landed cargoes so that they might stand a better chance of attending sales and bidding for flour and grain. Otherwise,

> When there is any goods come to the Back, it cannot be called a market for it is nearly all promised before it comes to those few persons who grasp all into their own hands[14].

In 1800, relief at Bristol was far better organised. A Provision Committee began collecting subscriptions in January only shortly after its counterpart at Bath[15], and although the Corporation wrote speculatively to the city's two MPs in February, urging them to use their influence in parliament to secure a shipment of grain 'within a month', they did not labour the point with Portland as they had done in 1795. Instead they sought a solution more in keeping with their civic and mercantile heritage; they played the market. At the end of February, councillors and Merchant Venturers requested financial backing for a new Committee which would make competitive bids for grain cargos in friendly international ports. Public subscriptions would enable constant supply; prices would then be pegged and a good return was ensured for

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14. Petition of 32 master bakers to the Mayor of Bristol, 28/9/1795, Town Clerk's Letter Boxes, 1795 box, unnumbered bundle.
15. Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 4/1/1800.

investors. With each Bristol banking house putting up £1000 and the Corporation giving £500, the Committee announced a preliminary budget of £15,500 and made an immediate bid for three cargos at Hamburg and one at Milford Haven[16].

By May, the Committee had bought up several large consignments of rice and wheat from London, Hamburg and America. Felix Farleys praised the business-like vision of the city's merchant speculators,

> for even if the price be high, the having it at any price, compared with the total deprivation of it, should induce our gratitude[17].

In fact, the price seems not to have been inordinately high, for the Provision Committee was able to close down its soup kitchen and suspend all operations on May 13th - whereas Bath's remained busy throughout the year and in May was in dire financial hardship amidst an 'increasing exigency of circumstances'. Grain ships continued to arrive at Bristol during the summer, and on their being joined in July and August by the return of the city's own 'fully laden', West Indian fleet, there was 'general joy' in the streets[18].

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16. Corporation Letter Book, Morgan to Portland 26/2/1800; Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 1/3/1800.
17. Felix Farley's Bristol Journal 17/5/1800.
18. Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 11/10/1800 records its first meeting since May. For Bath see Bath Journal 19/5/1800. Grain arrivals are reported in Felix Farleys 21/6/1800, 26/7/1800, 9/8/1800, 6/9/1800; Sherbourne Mercury 15/9/1800; & Bonner & Middleton's Bristol Journal 28/6/1800

Investors, if not the rest of the local population, were also advantaged by the increased pressures put upon Bristol market by retailers from outlying areas. The smaller port of Bridgwater had managed to attract at least one load of American flour in 1800, and merchants had sold some of it on at Street. But dealers in the town were still largely dependent upon middlemen at the 'plentiful market' of Bristol for a share in overseas trade, an inconvenience they shared with retailers in Timsbury, Shapwick, Frome, Corton Dinham, Crewkerne, Huish, Mells, Radstock, Yeovil and Shepton Mallet, according to information received by the Home Office[19].

As prices everywhere in the region began to climb steeply throughout June however, public expectation outstripped the philanthropic generosity of Bristol's merchants. 'I have heard', wrote a correspondent in Felix Farleys,

> that the late joyful importation of corn into this port is in a great measure locked up till the price is higher. I hoped that the loaf of the poor would be larger, but withholders, if the charge be true, appear disposed rather to grind their faces than issue out the corn for grinding[20].

And in Western Somerset, the cleric William Holland noted in his diary,

> It is somewhat suspicious that so much foreign corn

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19. This information is all contained in the questionaire replies now in HO 42/54, beginning at f.326.
20. Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 19/7/1800.

> should be brought into the kingdom, and yet the markets continue to rise...[21]

In the second week of July, early reports of a favourable harvest restored confidence, regional prices tumbled and a crisis was averted. Bristol's merchants began selling their foreign grain to the poor at reduced prices[22]. Although prices climbed steadily in the region between the middle of August and the end of the scarcity in the spring of 1801, Bristol was unique amongst market towns in the region in experiencing no major crowd disturbances until April[23]. The last recorded grain shipment ordered by the merchants' Committee arrived at Bristol in mid September 1800. At the beginning of October, the Provision Committee re-opened an expanded soup kitchen on two premises, and the merchants' initiative appears to have folded in the hope that accumulated stocks in city granaries would be sufficient to see Bristol's working population through the remainder of the scarcity[24]. The miscalculation was only minor, however severe the resulting disorder.

Bristol's Provision Committee was impressively organised in 1800. On January 1st, Parish sub-committees were requested to compile lists of all those expected to require relief in the coming weeks. Within a fortnight,

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21. Paupers & Pig-killers, P.41.
22. Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 26/7/1800.
23. The exception was a relatively minor incident during a sale of flour from a warehouse in September.
24. Sherbourne Mercury 15/9/1800; Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 26/7/1800 & 11/10/1800.

an estimate of 9,049 people in 10 parishes had been filed, and a premises for a soup kitchen acquired in Milk Street. At this stage, a separate Committee had already begun serving soup, potatoes, coal and bread in Clifton to another 1009 people (285 families)[25]. At the end of January, the Bristol Committee was serving soup at 1d a quart to about 7,500 people[26]. By March, the kitchen was open six days a week and when it closed in May it had sold nearly 18,000 quarts of soup in a little over three months. The number of people receiving relief by that time is uncertain[27]. Two kitchens were opened in January 1801, now dispensing soup to between 6,000 and 8,000 people <u>every day</u>[28]. The figures are pointers to the scale of distress in Bristol, but unreliable because it is not clear how many times a week a single applicant could receive soup, and because the Provision Committee were not the only voluntary body selling cheap goods. Apart from the Merchants' Committee, 'the wealthy' of Temple parish were selling cheap provisions to the poor in May, and the eccentric publican John Weeks formed his own relief committee in January. A 'Tradesman's Committee' sold cost price provisions to apprentices[29].

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25. <u>Felix Farleys Bristol Journal</u> 4/1/1800, 11/1/1800 & 18/1/1800.
26. Calculated by doubling the figure for the number of quarts being produced (3,637) and rounding it up to account for those who did not reach the front of the queue before the supply ran out. See <u>Felix Farleys Bristol Journal</u> 8/2/1800.
27. <u>Felix Farleys Bristol Journal</u> 1/2/1800, 8/3/1800, & 11/10/1800..
28. <u>Bonner & Middletons Bristol Journal</u> 24/1/1801, 14/2/1801 & 28/2/1801.
29 <u>Felix Farleys Bristol Journal</u> 3/5/1800, <u>Bonner & Middletons Bristol Journal</u> 24/1/1801.

Relief at Bath

Relief at Bristol was market-led, multi-faceted and only superficially dependent upon Corporation involvement and intervention. The situation was very different at Bath. With no comparable trading facilities at its small quay on the Avon, Bath relied almost exclusively upon its impressively organised Provision Committee for the relief of the poor during both famine periods. By and large, the Committee devised and directed Corporation policy; issuing strongly worded 'recommendations' to city magistrates reminding them of their duty to punish corrupt market practices, announcing bounty-payments to farmers on selected scarce provisions, and summoning all Bath's millers and bakers to 'recommend' compliance with the Privy Council's 'voluntary' Engagement of abstinence[30]. They were never content with the single-issue soup kitchen status of their occasional counterpart at Bristol, but acted as a high profile lobby and influential adjunct to the civil power. The activities, composition and relationship with the Corporation of the Bath Committee provide the most useful comparisons with organised Reevesism. Two of the most prominent members of the Provision Committee - Henry Harington in 1795-6 (treasurer), and Granado Piggott in 1800-01 (chair) - were also prominent on the committee of the Reeves

30. See particularly Bath Journal 20/7/1795.

Association. The pedigree showed; those who would not co-operate with the Provision Committee were denounced. Bakers who failed to honour the Engagement were publicly scorned in the newspapers, and local farmers were accused of hoarding grain[31]. Like the Reeves Association, the Provision Committee was bolstered by cash injections from the public purse via the Corporation, and by the slavish approval of the local press for its every utterance. In July 1795, there was even a ritualistic burning ceremony in front of the Guildhall, with underweight market produce consigned to a bonfire amidst the acclamations of a 'cheering crowd'[32].

The precarious instability of a system of relief that relied almost entirely upon voluntary subscriptions is also well demonstrated by the experience of Bath. In February 1795, the Provision Committee was selling subsidised bread, potatoes and coal to 9,522 people weekly[33], when bread prices at Bath were at their lowest for the entire year, and wheat 8s 3d a bushel. When prices peaked at the end of July at 14s 6d a bushel, there were no relief figures released. The Committee kept the price of its rice steady at 3d a lb despite the fluctuations of the open market, even when wheat prices hit 21s 9d in the summer of 1800[34]. Low rice prices

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31. Bath Journal 27/7/1795 & 17/8/1795.
32. Bath Herald 18/7/1795.
33. Bath Journal 7/2/1795.
34. See rice prices recorded in Bath Journal 27/7/1795 & five months later (11/1/1796), and then a month after that (Bath Herald 13/2/1796) for example.

guaranteed 'immense crowds' queuing twice weekly outside the Guildhall for a share of it, although when prices were at their highest in July, the crowds were considerably less 'immense' than might have been expected from the trend set in January 1795. On its own estimation of three persons to the average family, the Committee was selling rice to nearly 7,000 people at that date. In 1800 however, the figure was under 3,000. In mid January 1801, with wheat at 19s a bushel, this figure had tripled to 10,000 people - about one third of the population of the city[35].

One explanation for the discrepancy between the 1795 and 1800 figures is to be found in changing Committee attitudes to the 'deserving poor'. It does not appear that stringent qualification was a feature of relief in 1795, and the consequent demand always threatened to outstrip the pace of supply, which was reliant upon the continuing charitable subscriptions of the better off - a finite resource in times of high prices and escalating poor rates. Such fears became a reality at Bath in 1800. The Provision Committee began the year with an appeal and with no stated rules of qualification, just as it had done in 1795. In that year however, prices had not risen significantly until the end of June, and the Committee

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35. Bath Journal 14/7/1800 & 28/1/1801. Calculations are complicated because figures are given sometimes for persons and sometimes for families. The precise figures given were: 1795 - 6,990 people defined as 2,024 families; 1800 - 900 families; 1801 - 3000 families.

had been able to close down for the Spring. It had opened with a fresh appeal in the summer just as costs were spiralling, and although there are indications that its resources were becoming stretched by 1796, there was sufficient to see the scarcity through[36]. In 1800, subscribers were prevailed upon without a break throughout a difficult year, and there were signs of charity-fatigue amongst them before prices peaked in early July. The Committee launched a second appeal in May as funds began to dry up. This appeal was a success, primarily because the 'charitable' conscience of the better off was stimulated by its fortuitous co-incidence with a potato riot in Bath market place. Within a week of the riot, £142 had been collected. Then in June the Committee suddenly restricted relief to those persons who could produce a written notice of recommendation from a subscriber, and successful applicants would be eligible for relief only once a week to a proscribed quantity of rice according to the size of his or her family[37]. The opportunities which arose from such a system for the social and political control of the 'deserving' by the propertied classes, and obvious comparisons with RA 'vetting' procedures are self evident.

Later in June, 'their funds bearing no proportion to their weekly demands', (sufficient in fact to last only

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36. Funds and the scale of subscription were both dwindling in February 1796: See Bath Journal 15/2/1796, 22/2/1796 and 29/2/1796.
37. Bath Journal 19/5/1800, & 2/6/1800.

another fortnight) the Committee launched a third appeal. At the beginning of July then, the Committee were fast approaching insolvency at the most critical point of the scarcity, a time when bread was 'now almost out of the possible reach of a poor man's purchase'[38]. Matters were temporarily improved by a massive collapse in prices at the onset of an early harvest between July and the middle of August, but as the market rose once again, the Committee opened its fourth subscription of the year in the autumn. Applicants were reminded that there could be no relief without recommendation, and subscribers were asked to be 'particularly careful' when considering an applicant. At the end of January 1801, the Committee announced that it had barely enough money to continue for another three weeks. The £800 collected in December 1800 dwindled to £179 in January, and the situation was probably retrieved only by the decision of the magistrates in March to adopt Bristol's market returns for setting the assize of bread, and by the passing of the Brown Bread Act in February banning the use of Standard Wheaten flour[39]. If the low relief figure of 1800 was achieved through the qualification rules, it should be noted that the much higher figure of 10,000 people in 1801 was subject to the same conditions, more stringently applied. The number of people in the city who would have claimed relief but were unable to obtain a

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38. Bath Journal 23/6/1800 & 14/7/1800.
39. Bath Journal 15/12/1800, 28/1/1801, Bath bakers vs the Corporation June 1801, case notes in George Papers, Bundle 158, Bath Guildhall Record Office

recommendation is unknown, but we may safely estimate the true number of people in Bath seriously effected by the famine of 1800-01 as more than one third of the total population.

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The effect of scarcity in rural areas was not perhaps as great as in some market towns. The welfare of the poor was to some extent provided for by the landowners on whose farms they laboured, and in the neighbouring county of Dorset for example, was even enshrined by written agreement. A Dorset County Meeting in 1792 had resolved that all farmers would peg the price of wheat sold to their own labourers at 5s per bushel, regardless of fluctuations in the market, and the agreement held good during both the subsequent scarcity periods[40]. Farmers in Somerset and Wiltshire behaved similarly but followed no pre-organised plan. John Gibbs of Bishops Lydeard blamed an arson attempt on his barns in 1800 on distressed urban workers since he had been careful to offer full employment to the local 'lower order of people' threshing his harvest:

> I have actually sold it to them for 3 shillings a bushel under the market price, and they now seem perfectly easy and satisfied[41].

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40. K P Bawn, op cit., P.16.
41. HO 42/53 J Gibbs to Portland 20/11/1800.

William Holland sold newly cut wheat to the poor of his parish at 3s 6d less than the market price and similar practices were recorded in many parts of Wiltshire in 1795[42]. Eden's State of the Poor records the advantages enjoyed by labourers in corn-producing villages over those in villages like Seend where the economy revolved around out-work from the weaving industry. Local farmers allowed some discount to Seend's labouring poor on butter and cheese, but only to 'very few'[43]. But cheap village grain, whilst of obvious benefit to the rural poor, was not a principle in accordance with government policies to encourage abstinence from wheat - especially in 1796. Resistance to mixed grain bread was stronger amongst the rural poor in the Yeovil area for example, than it was amongst their urban counterparts

> perhaps owing to the poor people having their wheat or barley of their masters at a less than market price and making their own bread[44].

Policing The Marketplace.

The prevention of corruption in the marketplace was largely the responsibility of the magistrates, as the admonishing provincial press was fond of reminding them[45]. Considering the public outrage these malpractices

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42. The Courier 3/11/1795 for Wiltshire; Paupers and Pig Killers P.43 for Holland.
43. F Eden, The State of the Poor (London 1796), Vol 3, pp.794 & 799.
44. PC1/33 A.87, J King to Portland 30/3/1796.
45. Bath Herald 10/4/1795 & 16/5/1795; Bath Journal 20/7/1795. The Bristol Mercury 8/2/1796 blamed the

generated and the frequency of assertions in the newspapers that they were 'rife', prosecutions were remarkably few however. Bath's magistrates issued threats against unscrupulous traders throughout the 1795-6 scarcity, but took little action until it was virtually over[46] and magistrates supervising the great corn market of Devizes took no action against forestalling until June when wheat prices rose unexpectedly against the general downward trend[47].

If negligence was genuine, it may have stemmed from the difficulty of securing reliable evidence against offenders, uncertainty about interfering with the freedom of the market, or from a simple fear of expense - a factor which prompted the formation at Bristol and elsewhere of voluntary associations for the detection and prosecution of forestallers, regrators and engrossers[48]. Magistrates may, however, have intentionally directed greater energy towards the superintendence of weights and

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inability of the poor to buy meat 'even one day in the week' on regrating and magisterial inactivity.

46. Bath Herald 16/5/1795; Bath Journal 1/2/1796. Prosecution was dropped against a Bruton shopkeeper accused of forestalling and regrating when he agreed to make a public apology. But at the Wiltshire Summer assize, 2 Salisbury men (forestalling) and one woman (regrating) were convicted and fined. In October, a Trowbridge butcher was fined for regrating. See Bath Chronicle 28/7/1796; Bristol Mercury 15/10/1796; and Assi 21/18.
47. Bath Herald 10/6/1796.
48. For Bristol assocs see Bristol Mercury 5/9/1796, and Bath Journal 21/7/1800. The loyalist innkeeper, John Weeks paid for the prosecution of a regrator in 1796 and Chippenham Corporation prosecuted a forestaller in 1800: Bristol Mercury, 29/8/1796; F H Goldney (ed), Records of Chippenham (London 1889), p.113.

measures, a far easier objective which nevertheless ensured the visibility of magistrates in the market place and gave the impression that trading practices in general were under scrutiny. Mass inspection was not unusual. At Frome in 1795, no less than 40 convictions for short measures were secured in a single day - a lucrative exercise which was repeated by the magistrates in 1801 when another 33 were caught[49]. Additionally, magistrates were able to impound incorrectly weighed produce and make a gift of it to the poor - a popular way of demonstrating judicial intolerance of commercial unfairness. Butter was redistributed in this way at Bath in July 1795, in May the following year and again in August 1800[50]. The Frome convictions, coming as they did in immediate response to a market-place butter-riot, and the prosecution of several butchers at Bristol after a meat-riot, supports this approach[51]. Prosecutions against forestallers were more common in 1800-01 however, and occasionally exemplary[52].

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49. Bath Journal 1/6/1795; Bonner & Middletons Bristol Journal 2/3/1801. They were fined the usual 5s each. Occasionally, the sentence was harsher: A baker (see below) at Castle Cary was fined £1 for each underweight loaf in his possession - which, fortunately for him, was only eight. Bristol Mercury 25/5/1795. An investigation in 1819 found 'hundreds' of deficient weights in Frome Hundred (167 in Mells and Leigh parishes alone) and resulted in 100 convictions: Bath Chronicle 19/5/1819.
50. Bath Journal 20/7/1795; Bristol Mercury 2/5/1796. Bath Journal 1/9/1800.
51. Bristol Gazette 18/6/1795.
52. Bath Journal 18/8/1800 & 13/10/1800 gives details of two cases.

The most frequent targets of magistrates' investigations were those traders held in the greatest suspicion by the buying public - bakers. Although bakers' profits were controlled to some extent by the assize and by the price they themselves had to pay to millers for ground flour, their position at the end of the retail chain ensured that they took most of the blame for profiteering, reducing the size of the penny loaf, and the coarsening or adulteration of flour. If bakers were to respond positively to government requests that they mix grains to conserve wheat stocks, circumspection was most politic. In 1800 therefore, bakers at Huish were

> making a plentiful tho' clandestine use of the flour of barley and beans, mixing it with the flour of wheat for making bread[53] (my emphasis).

Many master bakers undoubtedly profited from rising prices. George Sloper of Devizes made about £1,700 from his business in a normal year (as he did in 1794), but in 1795 he made £2,562 and in 1800 £3,025[54]. Suspicion about unacceptable profiteering only increased in 1800 when Bamfords' textile mill at Twerton began baking their own bread for sale to their employees and found they could undercut the Bath bakers by 5d a loaf, yet still make a profit[55].

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53. HO 42/54, questionaire returns Nov 1800.
54. Manuscript Diary of George Sloper, master baker, Wiltshire Archaelogical Society Library, Devizes.
55. Bath Chronicle 30/10/1800.

Several newspapers exhorted the poor to break the bakers' monopoly by making their own bread. Yet as the baptist Thomas Parsons pointed out, the poor rarely had access to a suitable oven, or the opportunity to purchase corn or flour. Several bakers in Bath, claimed Parsons, already sold their bread cheaper than the assize but were still 'the objects of insult and menace' and 'ridiculous charges' of corruption[56]. The widespread practice of sale by sample at the farm - often by the rick-load as was customary in North Wiltshire[57], greatly reduced the likelihood of sale by the bushel in the marketplace, and made it virtually impossible for the poor to purchase small quantities of corn cheaply for home grinding and baking. At Bristol, a subscription flour-mill was mooted, where shareholders might grind their own corn at a fraction of the commercial price[58] - a scheme pioneered there in 1766, when the Corporation subsidised the creation of three such 'public mills'[59]. Now, initiative was left to the whims of the free market. A Bath baker offered to bake bread for the city's poor cheaper than the assize if a hundred donors would first lend him the

56. Thomas Parsons, Letters to a Member of the British Parliament on the Absurdity of Popular Prejudices; the Causes of the Present High Price of Food; the Means of Speedy Alleviation; and the Measures most Proper for Securing Future Plenty (Bath 1800).
57. Noted by A Gordon (Wootton Bassett) in a letter to Lord Portland 3/4/1796, PC1/33 A.87.
58. Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 6 & 20/9/1800. Latimer records that the co-operative Bristol Flour & Bread Concern, founded during the famine, survived to the end of the nineteenth century; Annals of Bristol in Nineteenth Century, P.8. See also Abstract of the Articles of Agreement of the Bristol Flour and Bread Concern (Bristol 1801).
59. Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 29/11/1766.

capital to purchase the flour in bulk, but there was insufficient interest and the scheme was abandoned[60].

Acrimonious disputes about the regulation of the assize, and the quality, price and weight of bread were a constant feature of relations between bakers and magistrates. The Bath and Bristol authorities both adopted the Privy Council engagement of 1795, urging the use of lower grade flours and abstention from luxury products, but also used the 1773 Act forbidding the sale of any bread finer in quality than standard wheaten. At Bath, these tactics were grounded in the refusal of the Provision Committee to trust the bakers to observe the engagement[61]. Afraid perhaps that a too rigid enforcement of the Act might provoke unrest and public resistance to coarser flour, magistrates did not prosecute any bakers for flouting it. Prosecutions of bakers did take place, but usually for ignoring the assize (selling underweight loaves) or contravening the Act of 1800 forbidding the sale of bread less than 24 hours old.

In the winter of 1795/6, discrepancies in assize legislation were tidied up by ministers to allow bakers

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60. Bath Journal 8, 15, & 29/9/1800, and 27/10/1800.
61. Bath Corporation adopted the engagement on July 16th but were immediately prevailed upon by the Provision Committee to enforce it with the 1773 Act and construct a more stringent voluntary engagement to use even coarser (branned) flour: Bath Journal 20/7/1795. The Committee claimed that only eight out of some 30 city bakers who had agreed to the engagement actually kept to it: Bath Journal 17/8/1795.

to sell mixed grain loaves under the assize[62]. The newspapers had been urging the use of mixed grain and vegetable bread for several months, but the new law was widely seen as an adulterators' charter. Even before the passing of the Brown Bread Act in 1801 (which, by banning unbranned flour, made all bread dark enough in colour to obscure unwholesome additions), one Bath baker invited the public to see for themselves the adulterated bread offered for sale by his rivals. He claimed to have samples of loaves containing lime, plaster of paris and bonemeal[63].

In 1795, the assize was set at Bath from the average weekly returns at the major grain markets of Devizes and Warminster. Although the Corporation scrapped tolls at Bath's own market in February 1800[64] in an attempt to encourage grain supplies, bakers' demands that the assize be set from it as well were resisted. They feared that with an average of only two loads of wheat coming into the market each week, the bakers would too easily control the price. These suspicions were deep seated and were the cause of the decision to set the present assize from two

62. See Roger Wells, Wretched Faces, Chapter 12, for the details of these moves.
63. Bath Journal 27/10/1800.
64. Bath Herald 22/2/1800. The experiment was not a success. Little extra corn came in and when it did, farmers refused to set a price on it. 'Their usual reply has been, when asked to do so, how much will you give?' Although a few local squires like Gore Langton of Newton Park ordered their tenant farmers to use the market, most went elsewhere and tolls were eventually reintroduced in March 1801. See Sherbourne Mercury 10/11/1800, and Bath Journal 2/3/1801.

separate markets; although the magistrates believed even these were manipulated by visiting Bath bakers. Faced with complaints that the Bath assize was amongst the highest in the country[65], the magistrates added the usually lower price returns from Bristol market to the equation. This pegged prices initially, but as they climbed once more in February 1801, the authorities took their biggest gamble yet and abandoned the assize altogether[66]. Bakers from out of town, until now banned from the market and still fiercely resisted by the Bath trade, were invited to sell bread 4 days a week on free pitches in the expectation that competitive enterprise would naturally regulate prices[67]. But the experiment was a failure. The quartern loaf actually rose to within a halfpenny of 2s, and the disillusioned local bench set the assize once more after just three weeks.

The magistrates continued to be 'inundated' with complaints. In March 1801 they stopped using the Wiltshire markets completely and set the assize solely from the recorded returns at Bristol - a move which still resulted in higher prices than those actually paid at Bristol because the Bristol bench often set their own

65. Bath Chronicle 23/10/1800. Uncertainty about how to operate the assize to the best advantage had already caused the magistrates to suddenly adopt the London practice of allowing 1d, 2d and 3d loaves alongside the larger peck, half-peck and quarterns: Courier 26/9/1800.
66. But they would continue to regulate the weight of the quartern loaf.
67. The measure had been urged by the Bath Journal back in August. The present monopoly, it said, made the Bath assize 'the worst in the country': 4/8/1800.

assize slightly below the official market return. This practice had been adopted at Bristol during the crisis of 1766 when the 'generous and careful' magistrates agreed to reimburse the bakers for their losses[68]. The Bath bakers now challenged the accuracy of the Bristol returns, obliging the mayor to query it so often that in April he apologised to the mayor of Bristol for 'the trouble I give you weekly in attesting the return made by your clerk of the market'[69]. In June, the bakers prosecuted the Corporation in the Court of Kings Bench for the 'inaccuracy' of the assize and tried, without success, to win recognition for Bath's own market returns[70].

Magistrates in Bristol avoided most of the complications that surrounded the disputes at Bath, but were not wholly at peace with their bakers either. In August 1800, following the seizure in the marketplace of underweight loaves and a spate of fines against offending bakers, Felix Farleys reported the trade ready 'to withhold supplying the inhabitants with bread'[71]. The bakers'

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68. Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 25/10/1766. The price is confirmed by the Assize of Bread returns preserved in the City Record Office. For the Bath decision see also Clark to Ludlow 5/3/1801 and Ludlow to Mayor of Bath 7/3/1801, looseleaf notes kept with Assize of Bread returns, Bristol City Record Office.
69. Attwood to Mayor of Bristol 24/4/1801, Town Clerk's Letter Boxes, 1801 box, unnumbered bundle, Bristol City Record Office.
70. This and much of the preceeding detail is set out in the case notes made by the Corporation's solicitor and clerk, Philip George; see George Papers, bundle 158, Bath Guildhall Record Office.
71. Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 16/8/1800.

refusal to comply with the law continued to irritate the city press the following year. In February, Bonner & Middleton's announced it had evidence that underweight loaves were endemic at Bristol and that fresh hot bread was being openly exposed to sale, in defiance of the magistrates, by 'most' bakers[72].

No assize was set at Salisbury where it was argued that a spirit of free competition between bakers was keeping prices lower than elsewhere[73]. Yet in the Summer of 1800, with bread prices now higher than at most neighbouring markets, the Salisbury Journal conceded that whilst the freely competing bakers were not to blame, they had no control over the extortionate demands of the farmers for grain. As at Bath, the small number of grain sellers in the market ensured high prices were maintained. Characteristically, local opprobrium fell on the bakers who were now accused of quoting one price for the public and another for forestallers (so low, it was alleged, that hucksters could sell bread on to the public and still undercut the bakers they had just bought it from![74] In response, the Corporation sought new ways to stifle monopoly in the grain market. A subscription was launched to enable them to negotiate a price at which they might purchase bread from the bakers for sale to the poor at a lower price. If the bakers tried to fix the price too high they were told, the Corporation would buy it

72. Bonner & Middleton's Bristol Journal 21/2/1801.
73. Salisbury Journal 14/4/1800.
74. Salisbury Journal 9/6/1800 & 25/8/1800.

elsewhere or else bake it. I have been unable to discover how the matter was resolved[75].

Some magistrates were confused by the complex legislation governing the assize. Francis Adams believed that he could not interfere with the price of bread at Keynsham because its distance from the nearest market town over which he had any jurisdiction (Wells) was greater than the Act allowed for the setting of an assize. And he could not use the Bath assize because it was set by borough rather than county magistrates. The Duke of Portland told him this was nonsense, since he could quite easily either send a messenger to Wells for the prices, or else order the clerk to the market to come and tell him them in person[76].

Mixed Grain and Substitutes

By October 1795, the Privy Council's enthusiasm for home-produced mixed grain and vegetable breads was turning into a demand to reverse current legislation banning bakers from selling it. The newspaper press urged this reform forward for such breads were not only

> considerably cheaper, but also equally palatable, wholesome and nutritious as that made from wheatflour alone[77].

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75. Salisbury Journal 8/9/1800 & Sherbourne Mercury 15/9/1800.
76. HO 42/36, Adams to Portland 19/10/1795; HO 43/7, Portland to Adams 23/10/1795.
77. Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 31/10/1795, & 12/12/1795. For earlier examples of newspaper

In March 1796, Portland sent a circular to provincial authorities to assess levels of support for the Privy Council recommendation. Although many replies were encouraging[78], some - often from large towns where wheat consumption was at its highest - were not. When first appraised of the Privy Council's advice in December, the Salisbury Journal waxed fondly about the advantages of barley bread:

> It is hoped that the poor will not take offence or prejudice at the idea of barley bread, but give it a fair trial from an assurance it will be found good. The poor and better sort of people eat this bread in north Wiltshire and the north part of Berkshire. They are not only contented but highly pleased with it[79].

This was rather a spurious claim. It was true that at Malmesbury, barley bread was preferred to the similarly low-priced coarse wholemeal wheaten loaves, but those who could afford it ate nothing but Standard Wheaten. As a borough alderman put it, the 'better sort of people' had been persuaded to use some mixed wheat and barley flour whilst

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support for substitutes see Bath Herald 4/7/1795 and Bristol Mercury 25/5/1795.

78. Of the 18 local replies that survive in the Privy Council papers, half suggest compliance by most of the inhabitants, but often without any formal agreement being entered into, and often without it being clear that the poor were very enthusiastic. See replies from Bristol, Yeovil, Marshfield, Downton, Warminster, Malmesbury, Somerton, Axbridge and Frome, PC1/33 A.87.

79 Salisbury Journal 7/12/1795.

> the poorer tradesmen used somewhat more barley meal; the poor people mixed very little wheat with their barley and the very poor people eat nothing but barley[80].

Forced to eat what they could best afford, the poor of Malmesbury chose the lighter of the two alternatives on offer. As to whether they were either 'contented' or 'highly pleased', the experience of nearby Wootton Bassett suggests an answer. The poor there certainly did eat a great deal of barley, but they were also

> the most difficult to be prevailed upon to accede to any plan of retrenchment adopted or proposed by the more frugal and industrious part of the inhabitants... (and) would prefer half a pound of fine wheaten bread to a pound mixed with any substitute... Many of them live five days of the seven on barley cakes and potatoes to enjoy their wheaten loaf the remainder of the week[81].

The Bristol Mercury, whilst a supporter of retrenchment, was more realistic. The paper admitted that barley bread was viewed with suspicion because of its effect on the bowels. Current grinding methods were notorious for leaving traces of husk which

> not only occasions the brown colour but also occasions that laxative quality which is prejudicial

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80. PC1/33 A.87, J Baysham to Portland 2/4/1796.
81. PC1/33 A 87, A Gordon to Portland 3/4/1796.

to hard working people if accustomed to that species of food[82].

The mayor of Salisbury, where 99% of all bread consumption remained standard wheaten, was embarrassed by the opposition of both 'principal inhabitants' and magistrates to the new engagement[83]. At Hindon none of the local millers would produce mixed grain flour 'and if they had the poor would not have bought it'. At Bath, Ilchester, Glastonbury and Westbury they refused even to mill wholemeal wheaten, despite the efforts of magistrates to publicise the recommendation 'in every street'. In many places therefore, the engagement was kept only by those families with the will and the resources to prepare their own bread[84].

In some important respects, of course, wheat consumption was nevertheless reduced. The labouring poor could not eat large quantities of a commodity they could scarcely any longer afford. And in many towns it was estimated that although no clear agreement had been reached, the better off were eating less bread. The difficulty was in estimating the effects such informal and wholly unmonitored measures were likely to have on national supplies. The Pitt ministry's preoccupation with the

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82. Bristol Mercury 25/1/1796.
83. PC1/33 A.87, W Bouther to Portland, 20/4/1796.
84. PC1/33 A.87, leter from J Roach (Glastonbury), 31/3/1796; C Poole (Ilchester), 2/4/1796; J Symons (Bath), 31/3/1796; D Vine (Westbury), 5/4/1796; & J Duthy (Hindon), 9/4/1796).

maintenance of market forces rendered coercive intervention an economic anathema - to the confused exasperation of magistrates who felt, as at Salisbury, their position undermined by the freedom of the people to ignore every recommendation of retrenchment. Resistance to 'agreements' was founded chiefly upon mutual mistrust. At Taunton for instance,

> No persuasion or effort could prevail on the inhabitants of this town to enter into any similar agreements - a general disappointment I regret seemed to prevail that the legislature had not adopted some coercive measure, restricting the bakers to the sole use of a particular kind of coarse flour.

At Frome it was felt that without a legal framework, the agreement simply invited the poisonous adulteration of bread, for the people would be 'too dependent on the honesty of the bakers'. The mayor of Salisbury believed that no voluntary agreement of abstinence would be followed in his city because few people accepted that the scarcity was genuine, and rather considered that ministers' time could be better spent in framing legislation to force grain hoarders to supply the markets[85]. At less than half the average price of wheat, barley was used extensively as a substitute by bakers in most parishes in 1800, although stiff resistance continued amongst the poor in parts of Somerset. Some

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85. PC1/33 A.87, letters from T Balne (Frome), 10/4/1796; J Gardiner (Taunton), 5/4/1796; & W Bouther (Salisbury), 20/4/1796.

considered it 'pernicious' to their health and inferior even to flour made from ground horse beans[86].

Oatmeal bread was more firmly resisted, despite the comparative cheapness of oats, because it was widely regarded as animal food and the Bristol Mercury's assurance that it was 'white and sweet so as to be hardly known from coarse wheaten bread' was to no avail. Oats were, as the rector of Radstock put it, 'little known as human food'[87]. The huge quantities of rice that were sold to the poor by provision committees in many towns are proof enough of its widespread use as a wheat substitute and, according to the press, of 'the estimation in which this nutritious food is now held'[88]. Forty tons of it were sold at Frome in the three months before the harvest of 1800[89]. But like barley, acceptance was purely a symptom of its cheapness and availability. Rice-bread was promoted in the press although in most parishes, as at Huish, 'the poor cannot be prevailed upon to use it'. Many found plain boiled rice 'insipid' and at Bridgwater the authorities feared popular resistance would continue unless spice and treacle could be obtained cheaply as well. Bath's Provision Committee managed to do just that, but rice sales had to be abandoned at Wells because 'it doesn't wash without molasses, and the latter are so dear

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86. HO 42/54, questionaire returns from Street, Corton Dinham and East Brent, November 1800.
87. HO 42/54, ibid.; Bristol Mercury 6/7/1795.
88. Bath Herald 12/3/1796.
89. HO 42/54, op cit.

that they can't purchase them'[90]. Although foreign corn was welcomed in every market that could get it, public reaction could be hostile. The 'indifferent quality' of the American corn imported by the merchants committee at Bristol was complained of at Corton Dinham, where it had made the bakers' bread taste stale for several months, at Timsbury and at Frome where

> the quality of it has been in general so very bad that the inhabitants have been dissatisfied with the bread and the importers rendered unpopular[91].

Soup, like rice, was sold in vast quantities by the provision committees, but there is no more evidence that the poor were satisfied with it, despite the grandiloquent claims of the Bath Herald that

> the quality of it could not be excelled had it been designed for the sumptuous table of a nobleman[92].

At Bristol there were complaints about the taste[93]. Felix Farleys blamed the 'base efforts' of the city ballad singers

> who go about endeavouring to poison the minds of the lower classes by miserable ditties, designed and

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90. For Huish and Bridgwater see HO 42/54; for press enthusiasms for rice, boiled or as bread, see Bath Journal 23/6/1800 or Bath Herald 13/2/1796; For Wells see SCRO DD/NE 15/5, Drake papers, G Perry to F Drake 15/5/1800.
91. HO 42/54 op cit.; Some merchants, including John Noble, agreed. See Bonner & Middleton's Bristol Journal, 3/1/1801.
92. Bath Herald 4/1/1800.
93. Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 1/2/1800.

calculated to render them unthankful and dissatisfied.

The ballad-singers' month-long war against the soup kitchen provoked calls for their 'total suppression'[94], recalling the response of the Harington regime at Bath to 'seditious' ballad-singing in 1793-4.

Grain scarcity in 1795-6 was in some measure alleviated by a good potato crop in the region and the acceptance of potatoes as a bread substitute, although they were not customarily eaten in great quantities[95]. The disastrous potato harvest of 1800 made even this option impossible and prices soared from an average 5-6 shillings a sack in Somerset in 1798, to anything between 10 shillings and £1 1s in 1800. Growers found potatoes much in demand (up to 300 sacks a week at Frome) but frequently beyond the purse of the poor. A Bedminster grower who offered his potatoes at 5d a quartern below the usual price at Bristol market, was forced by a cartel of angry competitors to restore his price to 1s[96]. At High Ham and Butleigh the poor were finally forced to accept barley as a substitute, not for wheat, but for potatoes![97] Dashed expectations led to discontent, as may be seen from the

94. Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 11 & 18/1/1800.
95. See for example, 'Statement of the Crops of 1795' in Horner Papers, Mells Manor Muniments. For their limited normal use see Poor House diets at Bristol, Minehead and Bradford, and domestic diet at Seend reported in Eden, op cit., pp.185, 647, 783 & 796.
96. Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 13/9/1800.
97. HO 42/54 op cit., and Bath Journal 14/7/1800.

relative incidences of potato price disturbances in 1795-6 (none) and 1800-01 (Bath, Wayford and Warminster).

Popular Regulation and Direct Action

The failure of interventionist or market-oriented measures to effectively combat scarcity was a cause of widespread popular disturbances which sought, in a variety of ways, to impose regulation. Direct action by consumers was not confined to 'rioting' however, and the following discussion deliberately rejects that term so that boycotting, certain types of petty theft, terrorism, and the sending of anonymous threatening letters can be considered as related phenomena. Historians have occasionally been more concerned with counting riots, and extrapolating an index to national trends in public order, than with the nature and meaning of disturbances. I have consciously rejected such an approach because, as I have demonstrated in the case of industrial combination, the survival of reliable source material is too erratic for an informed estimate to be made. An empirical table of known food-related disturbances in the region nevertheless appears as an appendix to this thesis to expose the inadequacies of previous attempts at quantitative analysis. The question of 'crowd-counting' is discussed in greater depth in an accompanying note.

The distinction between the 'respectable' tactic of boycotting traders who charged 'extortionate' prices, and that of coercion by crowds is often tenuous. In 1797 for example, butter was reduced in price at Bristol because 'the people would not purchase it' at a high price but also because 'some of them began to be riotous'. The Bristol Gazette, which publicly disapproved of rioting but promoted boycotting, avoided judgement and considered the subsequent sinking of prices 'very prudent'[98]. Had it been a boycott, a riot or both? Violence could be a characteristic of both forms of collective action, although in boycotting it was most often caused by the exposure of individuals to the wrath of the vendors rather than the other way round[99].

Boycotts sometimes overlapped with crowd activity, making assessment of their effectiveness difficult[100], but at other times their success was clear. Newspapers played a crucial role in publicising and approving boycotts. In 1796, the Bath Herald called for a boycott of the 'extravagant prices' demanded for butter, veal and lamb; then announced with satisfaction that prices had been forced down by 3d a lb[101]. There were successful butter

98. Bristol Gazette, 1/6/1797.
99. A boycotter was assaulted in the market at Bristol in 1772 by an enraged fish-seller: Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 27/6/1772.
100. For example at Bristol in 1795: Bristol Gazette, 4/6/1795.
101. Bath Herald, 23 & 30/1/1796. The paper called for a repeat of this tactic later that year when prices rose once again: 2/9/1796. See also the Bristol Mercury's invocation of butter boycotts at Exeter and Gloucester to incite Bristolians to do likewise:

boycotts at Salisbury, Bridgwater, Bradford and Bath in 1800[102]. Butter reached the towns of northern Somerset from the pasture-lands to the south only after jobbers had bought it at southern markets and increased the price at re-sale by up to 4d a lb (in 1795). The lure of lucrative urban markets in the north often resulted in unpredictable prices and availability in the south as well[103]. Boycotting butter was a viable method of popular coercive regulation to those sections of the community whose diet was varied enough to abstain from it for an indefinite period. Practicably it was an option for the better-off or the 'principle inhabitants'[104] rather than the labouring poor, and confined to non-essential commodities. For this reason, boycotting was never employed as a method of regulating bread prices.

Although it is not possible to establish whether many individual thefts of commodities were carried out purely because people were hungry or with any perceived sense of moral legitimation; some, like the nocturnal raid on a barley-waggon at Leigh on Mendip by three women in 1801, do invite this interpretation[105]. Certainly, the

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25/1/1796. Prices accordingly fell at Bristol after a boycott in April: Bath Chronicle 28/4/1796.

102. Bath Journal 22/9/1800, Salisbury Journal 29/9/1800, Bath Chronicle 9/10/1800, Sherbourne Mercury 20/10/1800.
103. See causes of the disturbances at Wells in 1795, HO 42/34, J Turner to Portland, 28/4/1795.
104. As at Gloucester; Bristol Mercury, 25/1/1796.
105. SCRO QS/R 369/2, case presented at Somerset QS, Easter 1801. See also a similar raid at Maiden Bradley, prosecuted at Wiltshire QS in July: WRO A1/110/1801. Thefts of small quantities of food, probably for personal consumption, were prosecuted

distinction between crowd action and organised thefts of firewood and vegetables from fields and gardens is not strong. Indeed, suppression of such thefts risked crowd mobilisation, as Lord Aislesbury's forester warned in 1795 after some extensive losses of firewood to the 'Easton plunderers' and 'the wicked people of the night': 'I am not sure it would be prudent or safe to punish them sharply'[106]. There were skirmishes between field guards and raiding parties at Dowlish Wake in 1801, and multiple prosecutions suggestive of wide participation at Wiveliscombe and Chelworth[107]. Sometimes group thefts assumed the character of organised rural warfare similar to struggles between landowners and poachers. Raiders near Yeovil in 1816 were led by a 'captain' crying, 'Close your files, attack, attack!'[108].

In the following discussion of those forms of direct action most often associated with crowds, I have not been constrained by the number of participants. Actions for example, which would not be considered by John Bohstedt because they did not involve the fifty participants

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regularly in scarcity. Examples: Radstock - 3/- worth of horsebeans; Warminster - 1 loaf; Kilmersdon - 7d worth of bread & cheese; Corsham - milk taken from cow. See SCRO QS/R 369/2, Easter 1801; WRO A1/110/1800, July 1800; Assi 25/1/3, Somerset felonies, indictments, Lent & Summer 1801.

106. WRO 1300/2500, Savernake Estate papers, Amis to Ailesbury 3/2/1795; 1300/2552 Amis to Ailesbury 20/2/1795; and 1300/2555 Amis to Ailesbury 14/4/1795

107. SCRO QS/R 369/1, Somerset QS, January 1801; WRO A1/110/1800. Wiltshire QS, October 1800.

108. Bath and Cheltenham Gazette, 25/12/1816.

necessary to meet his criterion for 'riot'[109] may be discussed here provided they fit an appropriate category of direct action. Apart from the obvious objections which one might level at Bohstedt's narrow definition (for example, that twenty or thirty people could engage in identical behaviour and achieve identical ends, or that contemporary estimations of participants rarely distinguish between activists and onlookers), the central problem with his model is that numbers of participants are often not recorded at all. Bohstedt has been side-tracked from the real issues (how, when, why and by whom direct action might be used) by a self-imposed need to define 'riot'. The forced reduction of butter-prices at Bruton by a single woman in 1795 was no less an assault upon market-led solutions (and no less effective), than hypothetical crowd regulations involving hundreds of people. Membership of a crowd might induce an individual to overstep 'normal' patterns of behaviour and this is important, but it is equally important to remember that confederacy with forty-nine others was often not a precondition. I have defined four broad areas of direct action usually undertaken by crowds; blockading or the stoppage of shipments, market-place price-fixing, deputations, and 'touring' or farm price-fixing.

Bristol was particularly vulnerable to blockades of incoming grain because of the proximity of close-knit

109. John Bohstedt, Riots and Community Politics in England and Wales, 1790-1810 (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), p.4.

collier communities both at Kingswood and in the producing districts of Gloucestershire. Effective blockades required tight organisation, community solidarity and pre-planning, and permitted the colliers to remain within their social strongholds which 'speak a jargon that is peculiar to them and unintelligible to a stranger'[110] rather than risk arrest in the city market-place. While blockades in the producing districts were motivated by the desire to retain grain for local consumption[111], those at Kingswood tried also to influence prices in Bristol market. This is why blockaders there not only held up waggons bound for Bristol in 1795, but struck work and withheld coal supples as well. Although troops were used to break the strike, magistrates were forced to parley with the colliers and discuss terms for a 'promise' that blockades would cease[112]. Bristol magistrates had little influence over blockades in the producing districts of course, and the possibility that magistrates in those districts were more concerned to preserve supplies in their own communities than in Bristol may have contributed to their longevity and success. Additionally, the necessity for troop cover in the major towns and markets presented

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110. Sir S Eden, op cit., on the Kingswood miners, p.646.
111. Bristol Corporation Letter Book, Smith to Portland 10/7/1795 and subsequent letters from both Smith and Harvey, 17/10/1795 & 4/11/1795, for the concerns of Bristol magistrates about the effectiveness of these actions.
112. HO 42/34, Rooke to Portland 10/5/1795; Bristol Gazette 14/5/1795; and Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 14/11/1795 in which the 'promise' is referred to in the context of a later dispute.

difficulties for Rooke when he was asked to commit men to the policing of the Wye and Severn barge routes. The available military force, as he readily acknowledged, was already over-stretched[113]. The Gloucestershire blockade began again in 1800, but was less damaging because Bristol stopped relying on supplies from that region and imported more of its grain from abroad. Blockades ceased in the summer, once it became clear that the disappointing harvest was unlikely to free any Gloucestershire grain for export away from the local area[114].

Blockades and stoppages of a more spontaneous nature, and aiming to preserve home produce, were fairly common in the summer of 1795. A crowd of women successfully occupied a grain barge at Bath and forced its unloading. Waggons were held up at Somerton, where expropriation was prevented by the intervention of local gentlemen who bought up the offending grain and quickly re-sold it cheaply to the crowd, and at Hilmarton[115]. Legitimising codes of conduct in waggon stoppages could differ from those most often adopted by crowds in the market place

113. WO1/1092, Rooke to Wyndham 7/6/1795; Burgoyne to Wyndham 7/6/1795; Rooke to Lewis 11/6/1795 and Rooke to Wyndham 24/6/1795.
114. Bristol Corporation Letter Book, Morgan to Sheffield and Bragge, 15/2/1800; Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 5/4/1800.
115. Bath Herald 8/8/1795, General Evening Post 4/8/1795 for Bath; Bath Herald 6/8/1796 for Somerton; and WRO 1300/2343, Savernake Estate papers, Ward to Ailesbury 3/7/1795 for Hilmarton. The latter case is suspicious because it was possibly organised by a farmer to prevent his produce going to market at an 'agreed' low price.

where 'fair' prices might be imposed upon retailers. Waggoners passing through or leaving the market fully laden were not likely to be retailers but the agents of price-inflating bulk purchasers. Unsurprisingly they were suspected of complicity in large-scale forestalling, regrating and engrossing, and resented for stripping local markets at preferential bulk prices. Produce might therefore be taken from them by the crowd without any payment being offered. At Ludgershall in 1800 for example, two waggons, one of flour and one of barley, were held up on the same day. The barley had been bought at the market before 9 am., and before most local consumers had arrived, by a brewery at Devizes. The second waggon was stopped as it passed through Ludgershall en route elsewhere. Payment was not offered for the goods appropriated on either occasion, and the crowd even 'wasted a considerable quantity out of two sacks' by deliberately spilling them, so these cannot be seen as attempts to regulate prices. Crucially, the goods had not been offered for sale[116].

A different set of circumstances surrounded the stoppage of a flour waggon at Faringdon Gurney. This time the vehicle belonged to a miller who had instructed his driver to deliver a consignment of ground flour to the

116. WRO A1/110/1801, Wiltshire QS January 1801, statements of Charles Nash and John Goodall, 21/110/1800. The same code of conduct may be seen in the appropriation of goods from passing waggons in the outlying districts of Bristol. See Corporation Letter Book, J Ireland and W Price to Rooke, 4/4/1801.

village and collect another load of corn for grinding. The flour taken by the crowd was therefore destined for local sale anyway once it had been collected by the farmer, and the waggoner was accordingly offered a 'fair' price for it. His refusal on the grounds that the flour was not his to sell resulted in its appropriation without payment[117]. These 'rules of engagement' were not binding upon crowd behaviour of course, and exceptions like the offer of 'fair' payment made to butter jobbers leaving Wells market in 1795[118] will certainly be found. In this incident and in a similar one at Bruton, jobbers may have been offered payment because they were only just leaving the market. In two others at Englishcombe and Shipham, in which jobbers were ambushed in open country between markets, no payment was offered[119]. Whatever the discrepancies, these indications of the complexity of legitimising trends in direct action remain strong.

The 'classic' type of eighteenth century price disturbance took place in the market itself. In the majority of cases for which sufficient detailed evidence survives, 'fair' prices were demanded of retailers, backed with the threat of outright theft and violence to property if they refused. Butchers at Bristol, for example, were prevented from leaving the market in 1795

117. HO 42/53, J W Tooker to Portland 22/11/1800.
118. HO 42/24, J Turner to Portland 28/4/1795 & 6/5/1795.
119. For Bruton see SCRO Q/SR 363/3, Somerset QS, July 1795, Statement of Peter Cleeves, 4/5/1795; for Englishcombe see Bath Chronicle 30/10/1800; and for Shipham see Bath Journal 16/2/1801.

until they accepted the crowd's price. Only one appears to have had his property damaged and his meat stolen, and that was because he persistently refused to comply[120]. Bakers at Trowbridge were 'obliged to deliver up all their bread at the price of three sixpenny loaves for a shilling' by a crowd in 1795, whilst butter and bread prices were regulated in a similar way at Frome in 1795 and 1796[121]. The scale of some incidents escalated rapidly. At Bath in 1800, a sudden three-fold rise in potato prices prompted a small group of women to try to force a fifty per cent reduction on market retailers in the morning. This appears to have been prevented. In the afternoon, a larger crowd gathered and marched to the house of a man in Walcot who had

> imprudently boasted of his having purchased one hundred sacks of potatoes which he was determined to keep up til they should produce 1 gn per sack although they cost him only 4d.

They broke his windows, then marched on to a market garden in Larkhall where they confronted a man guarding his potato crop and offered him 6d a sack for them. When

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120. The Bristol disturbances are well documented in the Bristol Mercury 8/6/1795 & 15/6/1795; Bath Journal 8/6/1795; and the Courier 11/6/1795. The reasons for several violent attacks upon fish mongers are less certain, but one other man had his windows shattered because he was a suspected hoarder of fish.
121. WO1/1090, P Gibbs to Wyndham 13/5/1795 for Trowbridge; Bath Chronicle 14/5/1795 & Bath Herald 29/4/1796 for Frome. For further examples see tables of disturbances in appendix. Often, as with cases at Frome and Trowbridge in 1800, it is not possible to tell whether 'fair' prices were offered or why violence was used. See SCRO Q/SO 17, Somerset QS minute book f.168 for Frome and Bath Journal 18/8/1800 for Trowbridge.

the gardener refused, the crowd invaded his land and removed ten sackfuls without payment, pelting him with stones when he interfered. Events were curtailed only by the arrival of the Volunteer cavalry who scattered the crowd and patrolled the streets until the following day[122]. Crowd targets at this incident began with retailers. The fact that the women were offering them more than they had paid a week previously suggests a degree of sympathy with their difficulties, as does the switching of attention in the afternoon to hoarders and producers, the real 'villains' of the price-increase. The first question asked of the market gardener for example was the price he was selling his produce for; and his reply that he sold it at whatever price other producers charged triggered the crowd's decision to take it without payment. It was tantamount to an admission that prices were being dictated unjustly and arbitrarily by a producers' cartel.

Crowds did not always use their strength to directly prevent transportation or reduce prices. By visiting magistrates, overseers or landowners as an ostensibly peaceful deputation, though in numbers which barely concealed their potential power, crowds hoped to win concessions without breaching the law. The magistrate Francis Adams for instance felt obliged to promise

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122. HO 42/50, J Bowen to J King, 17/5/1800; SCRO Q/SR 368/3, Somerset QS July 1800, Statement of Andrew Hyott, 9/5/1800; Bath Herald 10/5/1800; Bath Journal 12/5/1800.

cheaper bread to a deputation who waited on him in 1795, in order to persuade them to go home;

> They behaved very peaceably, they told me it was agreed before they came from home not to take any step till they had first heard what I could do for them.

He had no idea how he was going to keep his side of the bargain however, and acknowledged he had 'exceeded my power as a magistrate'[123]. At Bridgwater another magistrate met a crowd 'with tears' to assure them

> he felt for their distresses and promised to exert his utmost to relieve them. With this assurance they were very well pleased and immediately returned to their homes. What he intends to do I have not heard...[124].

Deputations of estate workers marched to meet Lord Pembroke and Lord Ailesbury's foresters in 1795[125]. Fresh from a vestry meeting in which the poor of Stowey 'crowded upon us in such a manner that we scarce knew what to do', the clergyman William Holland was afraid that the conciliatory attitude of many magistrates to deputations was making them dupes of the indolent:

> The justices, if they are not more cautious, will create the evil they meant to avoid. They plead the

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123. HO 42/36, Adams to Portland 19/10/1795.
124. SCRO DD/AH, bundle 59/12, Davis to Acland 1/4/1801.
125. For Pembroke see Courier 1/12/1795; and for Ailesbury see WRO 1300/2550, Savernake Estate papers Amiss to Ailesbury 3/2/1795. Amis was most apprehensive: 'Though they have at present dispersed quietly, if their distressing situation continues long it is not easy to know what they may be induced to do'.

> dearness of provisions and think by granting them all demands to make them quiet, but it has a contrary effect - they expect to be kept in idleness... They grow insolent. Subordination is lost.

The overseers, claimed Holland, were being 'harassed to death'[126]. Several hundred Mendip colliers dragged a Timsbury miller before a magistrate in 1796 and requested that he be prosecuted for monopoly. It won them a signed 'voluntary' undertaking from their victim to reduce his prices. When they grabbed a Cridlingcot baker a few days later and tried to have him prosecuted for short-weight bread, they were less fortunate however, for the man began proceedings against them for 'stealing a loaf under pretence of taking him before a magistrate'[127].

Deputations were usually received with tactful, and no doubt often genuine sympathy in rural areas where traditions of paternalism and the absence of effective military back-up made policing by consent and negotiation a virtual necessity. Urban deputations were not always met with such courtesy. When the Mendip colliers staged a mass demonstration against rising prices in Bath and asked mayor Henry Attwood to petition the King for relief, he allowed only two representatives into the

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126. J Ayres (ed), Paupers and Pig-killers: The Diary of William Holland, a Somerset Parson 1799-1818, (Gloucester 1984), pp.47-8.
127. Bonner and Middleton's Bristol Journal 23/4/1796; SCRO Q/SR 364/2, Somerset QS July 1796 (Britten vs Hudson and others); Bath Chronicle 21/7/1796.

Guildhall, refused to send a petition, and told them to disperse at once, admonishing them for 'the great offence they had been guilty of in raising such a large and illegal body of men'. The local press were agreed that the colliers 'showed no inclination to be riotous or disorderly', but Attwood was afraid their presence would incite disturbances amongst the 'ill-disposed inhabitants of this city of the lower class'. In this he was proved correct, and troops had eventually to be summoned to clear the streets. A Bath tailor was arrested for telling the colliers to bring arms with them next time and fight like the 'Irish rebels'[128].

The large crowds which toured much of the West Country in March and April 1801, forcing 'fair' price agreements at the point of production rather than in the market-place, presented the most systematic challenge to magistrates' efforts to protect the free market. It was a tactic used only fleetingly by the Wiltshire weavers in 1795 when the eventual arrival of the crowd in Warminster provided an opportunity for their dispersal by the Yeomanry[129]. Touring crowds operating on this basis were unlikely to precipitate situations in which they might be charged with theft, and their mobility and unpredictability presented problems for magistrates and military commanders who were accustomed to marshalling their forces in the market-place. It is this that makes the

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128. Bath Chronicle 23/10/1800; Bath Herald 25/10/1800; HO 42/52, Attwood to Portland 21/10/1800.
129. Courier 24/7/1795.

1801 initiatives so different from those of 1766 and 1772. In those years, touring crowds had visited farmers and millers throughout the region, but rarely to set prices. Mass appropriation from producers had resulted in shootings, the firing of farms, mills and granaries, and punitive sentencing at special sessions[130]. Legal remedies in 1801 were therefore more difficult to pursue, and crowd success was bolstered by the achievement of qualitative improvements in inter-regional liaison and co-operation. Common agreement on fair price uniformity was adopted from South Somerset to Gloucestershire, as the paper circulated by the Kingswood colliers which began 'This his to certifie that provisions is fallen at Taunton' was to demonstrate[131]. Price-fixing was not always reactive. On March 30th, separate crowds at Chard, Stowey and Old Cleeve all enforced a maximum price of 10d on the quartern loaf, a coincidence suggestive of pre-arrangement[132]. The assumption that prices were no longer to be regarded as parochially variable was significant. For the first time, crowd action began to wear the aspect of a co-ordinated outward-looking popular movement.

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130. See Bath Chronicle 25/9/1766 for destructive rioting in the Somerset/Wiltshire weaving district and the shooting of two members of the crowd, and 18/12/1766 for trial of 42 Wiltshire rioters by Special Commission (one execution). For touring crowd in South Somerset in 1772, seizure of dairy produce and woundings from farmers' guns see Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 13/6/1772.
131. HO 42/61, Small to Portland 9/4/1801, and 14/4/1801.
132. For Old Cleeve see Bath Chronicle 23/10/1801; for Stowey see letter from Tom Poole to Coleridge quoted in H Sandford, Thomas Poole and his Friends (London 1888), 2, p.43; and for Chard see HO 42/61, ? (Yeovil) to Portland, 1/4/1801.

Community solidarity in weaving towns was as important to the success of touring crowds as it had been in the coalfields to the organisation of blockades. The linkage between marchers in Devon and South Somerset for instance appears to have been grounded in the common cross-county struggle of the weavers to resist machinery. Somerset and Devonian 'delegates' met at Bradninch for this purpose in 1793 and a magistrate claimed it was 'well-known that men styling themselves delegates' were communicating plans within the same area in 1801[133]. Most of the 1400 men who marched out of Chard in April were said to be weavers[134]. Roger Wells' assertion that crowds were composed primarily of urban workers, encouraged though it is by the district military commander's quest to 'segregate the peasantry from the inhabitants of the town', may be an over-simplification however. On March 30th, 'all the men of Stogursey and neighbouring parishes', many of them estate labourers, had 'joined together' to draw up demands 'to oblige all the farmers to sine'. These were then ratified by marchers from other villages in 'Articles of their Grievances' and proclaimed at Stowey market-place. After canvassing several magistrates this crowd marched 'snowball-like' and a thousand-strong to Bridgwater; in other words <u>from</u> the countryside <u>to</u> the town[135].

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133. <u>HO 42/25</u>, Stoppard, Norman and Sheppard to Franklin, 24/6/1793; <u>HO 42/61</u>, Tucker to Portland 9/4/1801.
134. <u>HO 42/61</u>, ? (Yeovil) to Portland, 1/4/1801.
135. Roger Wells, 'The Revolt of the South West, 1800-01' <u>Social History</u>, 6 (October 1977), pp.740-44 & 729;

Despite General Simcoe's conviction that 'the law of the country is totally overthrown from the Parrett to the Teign'[136], and the fact that farmers were effectively being forced to sign agreements to sink prices (one who refused was threatened with lynching[137]), the response of the authorities was confused and often muted. The crowds' self-perceived legitimation shows in their efforts to persuade commanders of Yeomanry (Chard) or magistrates (Bridgwater & Kingswood) to sanction their demands by signing the agreement papers. Actual violence was scrupulously avoided. The Stogursey crowd 'committed no violence, indeed they met with no opposition' while a Bridgwater magistrate testified to

> the orderly behaviour of the petitioners, for I will not call them a mob... It was their intention not to commit any riotous act... they had no bludgeons or sticks of any kind in their hands[138].

When Lord Poulett checked the progress of the Chard crowd at Ilminster with a troop of King's Bays, they were on the second day of a tour which had already humiliated the Yeomanry and subverted a company of Volunteers. County magistrates had met a day previously in Taunton to draw

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letter from Simcoe in G Pellow, The Life and Correspondence of Henry Addington, First Lord Sidmouth (London 1847), 1, pp362-3; SCRO DD/AH, bundle 59/12, Strong to Acland, 30/3/1801.

136. G Pelew, op cit., pp.362-3.
137. See HO 42/61, ? (Yeovil) to Portland, 1/4/1801.
138. H Sandford, op cit., p.43; SCRO DD/AH, bundle 59/12, Davis to Acland 1/4/1801. For other descriptions of peaceful crowds see ibid., Strong to Acland 8/4/1801 and Courier 2/4/1801 (Taunton).

up draconian new rules for dealing with crowds like this one which confirmed the role of the military and sanctioned their use without recourse to the Riot Act 'in cases of great necessity'[139]. Poulett ignored these guidelines, choosing instead to parley with twelve delegates and offer terms. In nearly two hours of negotiation, the Lord Lieutenant shifted his ground three times to accommodate the marchers' demands and finally persuaded them to accept a 1s loaf instead of a 10d loaf after committing local magistrates and farmers to further price-cutting talks in four days time[140].

Simcoe, now haunted by visions of 'the impatient poor, misguided by a set of Jacobins' marching on the capital, was furious at Poulett's capitulation[141]. But he was not the only figure in authority out of step with Pitt's commitment to laissez-faire. The Stogursey magistrate, John Acland believed government must intervene if the farmers would not come to terms, although 'the farmers have the remedy in their power'[142]. Magistrates charged with keeping the peace from day to day could ill afford the luxury of speculating about the authenticity of the scarcity and farmers' actual room to manoeuvre. They had to consider popular suspicions about artificiality and shortages created by monopolising farmers and, just as

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139. See Bath Chronicle 9/4/1801 and Bonner & Middletons Bristol Journal 11/4/1801, for details of this meeting..
140. HO 42/61, ? (Yeovil) to Portland, 1/4/1801.
141. HO 42/61, Simcoe to Poulett (copy), 1/4/1801.
142. SCRO DD/AH, bundle 59/12, Acland to Davis, 2/4/1801.

when dealing with deputations, often felt powerless and vulnerable in the face of the crowd's expectation of them. John Acland was out when the Stogursey crowd came to his door to persuade him to sanction their price-agreement paper. For this he was 'congratulated' by a friend who warned

> If you had given sanction to their proceeding, you would have been by many condemned, and that you did it from the motive of fear; if you had not on the other hand, you would have been subject to the resentment of these people[143].

In rejecting price-regulation however, the government had accepted the reality of scarcity and the possibility of famine and the 'moral economy' offered few solutions to genuine shortage. The position was put to Bath magistrates by Portland's under-secretary in 1800:

> I am sorry that it should be supposed that the present high price of provisions is the effect of Monopoly... Although the scarcity may have been somewhat over-rated, it is evident... that there was a very great deficiency in last year's crop and this is undoubtedly the cause of the present high price of corn[144].

Magistrates were agreed, of course, that the touring crowd movement had to be halted, but not on the means to be employed.

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143. ibid., Davis to Acland, 1/4/1801.
144. HO 43/11, J King to J Bowen, 20/5/1800.

On the same day that the Somerset county bench agreed new guidelines for tackling riots, two key arrests were made at Old Cleeve near Minehead. Samuel Tout and Robert Westcott were accused of leading a crowd which forced a baker to reduce his bread prices on the spot, thus facilitating a charge on the capital offence of theft. Their swift conviction and execution at the assize which opened the following day was well-calculated to discourage Somerset crowds[145], although the period between their conviction (April 3rd) and execution (April 15th) saw continuing unrest in neighbouring counties. The Bristol region in particular was convulsed by market-place price-fixing, coal strikes and a touring crowd at Kingswood between April 4th and 15th, another touring crowd left Warminster on the 7th, and rioting was deterred by troops at Devizes on the 8th[146].

The salutary effects of Tout and Westcott's trial may partly have been spoiled by the meeting arranged by Poulett between farmers and magistrates on April 4th which resulted in the 'voluntary' pegging of wheat prices to 12s a bushel in the Ilminster district. There followed

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145. The same philosophy had been held by county magistrates after Gordon rioting at Bath in 1780: 'If it appears that there is sufficient proof to convict... capitally, I humbly think they should be immediately brought to trial to terrify others': SP 37/21, John Caldwell to Lord Hillsborough, 11/6/1780.
146. The Bristol disturbances are catalogued most fully in HO 42/61, Small to Portland, 14/4/1801; and Bonner & Middleton's Bristol Journal 11/4/1801. For Warminster see Bath Chronicle 9/4/1801; and for Devizes see the Courier, 14/4/1801.

similarly sanctioned agreements at Bridgwater, Stogursey and Taunton, all of which confirmed the prices previously set 'illegally' by the crowd[147]. When the Kingswood colliers requested parity however, magistrates dispersed them with dragoons and told them price reductions 'cannot be affected by any interference of the magistrates'. This was most inconsistent, for the Kingswood men will have remembered a similar agreement entered into between magistrates, farmers and themselves in 1795[148]. The stupefied colliers maintained their strike for a further six days in the face of stiff magisterial determination to crush it, and finally returned to work as prices fell naturally in Bristol market[149]. Few local observers expected the Somerset agreements ('not a willing act but extorted through fear') to last very long. By April 22nd, the Bridgwater agreement had been abandoned by the farmers and fresh crowd mobilisations were perhaps only avoided by the general collapse of prices that signalled the end of the scarcity[150]. Crowd regulation had been no more successful in the long term. Although most farmers had signed papers to appease touring crowds in the Taunton area, they sent no corn to market in the following days 'and an absolute deficiency of bread was

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147. SCRO DD/AH, bundle 59/12, Bridgwater handbills signed by farmers and magistrates dated 2/4/1801; Sherbourne Mercury 13/4/1801; S Pole, Crime, Society and Law Enforcement in Hanoverian Somerset (Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge 1983), p.209.
148. Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 14/11/1795.
149. Bonner & Middleton's Bristol Journal, 18/4/1801; HO 42/61, Small to Portland 14/4/1801.
150. SCRO DD/AH, bundle 59/12, Davis to Acland, 10/4/1801, 15/4/1801, & 22/4/1801.

experienced'. Poulett thought a similar experience at Chard which resulted in no bread in the town for three days had taught the crowd the error of their ways. He offered the town 'Speenhamland' relief on April 7th and 'they seemed perfectly satisfied'[151].

Crowds, Magistrates and the Law

The difficulties faced by magistrates in subduing crowds with inadequate military support[152] and without exacerbating further unrest have already been noted. Law enforcement in parts of Somerset was so unreliable that the captain of the only troop of Yeomanry 'between Cary, Bristol and Bath' felt obliged to gallop around the county visiting each magistrate in turn to explain the process by which his forty-two men might be called out[153]. Soldiers called to meet the Bridgwater touring crowd in 1801 proved useless anyway for they 'assured the people that they would not fire on them' and the sailors declared that if they did, then they would shoot the soldiers[154]. Lone constables were overpowered during the Larkhall potato seizures and at Wincanton, and at Frome four constables sent to disperse a crowd joined it

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151. Courier, 4/4/1801 & HO 42/61, Poulett to Portland, 8/4/1801.
152. Further evidence of over-stretched military forces may be gleaned from WO1/1052, Stevens to Yonge, 1/10/1795; WO1/1090, & P Gibbs to Wyndham 13/5/1795.
153. Mells Manor Muniments, Capt. Stevens to T Horner, November 1795.
154. SCRO DD/AH, bundle 59/12, Davis to Acland 1/4/1801.

instead[155]. Magistrates were in any case too thinly scattered in some areas to exert sufficient influence[156]. Conciliation did not endear them to many farmers and retailers however. George Donisthorpe, magistrate and commander of the Somerton Volunteers, permitted the stopping of a grain waggon at the town in 1795 because 'the present was not a period for magistrates to be rigourous in their offices'. He was later convicted for neglection of duty[157].

In urban communities, particularly where borough magistrates and billeted troops were available, the suppression of crowds was a more realistic proposition. The magistrate John Bowen was calculating in his use of the law following the Bath potato disturbances in 1800. Prisoners were taken at each stage of the day's events; several women in the morning for price-fixing (released with a caution), one man for attacking the hoarder's house in Walcot (committed to the assize), and one man for stealing potatoes in Larkhall (committed to the quarter sessions)[158]. Price regulation in the market at Bristol in April 1801 was contained by magistrates, Volunteers and sections of the militia despite the probable disaffection of some militiamen. The policing

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155. G. Sweetman, The French in Wincanton (Wincanton 1897), p.12; SCRO Q/SO 17, Somerset QS minute book, case against Harvey, Little and others, July 1800..
156. There was only one county magistrate resident in Wells in 1795, and none within three miles of Frome. See WO1/1092, Burgoyne to Wyndham, 7/6/1795.
157. Bath Herald, 6/8/1796.
158. HO 42/50, Bowen to Portland, 17/5/1800.

operation cost the Corporation more than £100, but it was a price urban centres were both willing and able to pay 'to preserve the free markets'[159].

Despite their stern rhetoric, Bristol magistrates had acted indecisively over popular regulation in 1795. Fish mongers were subjected to sporadic crowd violence for two days and butchers forcefully regulated before they ordered a dispersal and arrests. By this time, a butcher had had his house damaged and his meat stolen, a crime for which a brewery worker, William Gage, and two others appeared before the Bristol assize in March 1796, but only because the butcher, Samuel Kingdon, brought a prosecution. The case against Gage was very thin. His employer testified that he had been at work during the riot, and several workmates later signed affidavits to the same effect. The defence failed to call them because his solicitor was confident of acquittal. Kingdon's only witness was, after all, another butcher. But Gage was convicted and sentenced to death. Far from making effective exemplary propaganda for the authorities, news of the outcome caused an immediate popular outcry and a reprieve was hastily granted a few days later. This was itself a signal for a crowd to re-gather in a threatening

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159. Courier 11/4/1801; Bonner & Middleton's Bristol Journal, 11/4/1801; J Latimer, Annals of Bristol in the Nineteenth Century (Bristol 1887), p.7. The disaffection in the militia is sugested by the arrest of four of them during the disturbances. Bristol magistrates made their opposition to regulation equally clear in 1795: Bristol Gazette, 11/6/1795.

manner outside Kingdon's house[160]. The whole affair had been a costly disaster for the authorities.

The seriousness of the 1801 disturbances prompted the judiciary into much public clarification of the legal definition of regulation as theft. The judge who sentenced Tout and Westcott explained that their imposition of a lower price for a loaf

> is in fact the same as if they had taken it without paying anything because no person has a right to fix the price and take another's property[161].

Widely circulated statements like this were of key importance in confirming the primacy of market forces and the legal rejection of 'moral economy'. The Recorder of Bristol enlarged this definition four days later when he threatened to treat as accomplices to theft 'all persons who stood by and abetted by such measures'[162].

Roger Wells has argued that the Somerset summer assize of 1801 represented a watershed of legal redress against crowd regulators, tempered by paternal lenience towards subsequent offenders[163]. It was not quite so simple. It is true that a woman from Faringdon Gurney was transported rather than hanged for an offence that was

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160. Bristol Quarter Session and Assize Calendars and Miscellaneous Papers, Bristol City Record Office; Bristol Corporation letter Book, Smith to Vicary Gibbs, 17/4/1796; Bristol Gazette, 31/3/1796 & 14/4/1796; The Watchman, 6, 11/4/1796.
161. Bath Journal 13/4/1801.
162. The Courier, 11/4/1801.
163. Roger Wells, Wretched Faces, p.275.

actually more serious than Tout and Westcott's, but the principle witness in the case - the waggoner from whom she was accused of stealing flour - was himself prosecuted at the same assize for stealing flour from his master's waggon on another occasion. Secondly, although a Wayford man had his indictment reduced from grand larceny and riot to the misdemeanour of false imprisonment, it is unclear whether it was due to lenience or paucity of evidence. Thirdly, the remainder of those charged with crowd offences were not all acquitted or sent to the sessions as Wells claims. Two of the four women accused of stealing bread at Montacute received six months hard labour at the summer assize and the other two were similarly convicted, after much traversing, at the Lent assize in 1802. Thus, eighteen months after the offence had been committed and a year after the execution of Tout and Westcott, when exemplary justice had long ceased to be the motivation, the Montacute case was concluded with some severity[164]. Nor were the sentences given to the Montacute women or the Faringdon woman particularly lenient for crowd crime in the region. The only death sentence delivered in 1795-6 was that against William Gage, and although two men were transported for seven years and one gaoled for six months for offences at Westbury and Pewsham, and the man who led the expropriation of potatoes at Larkhall in 1800 was gaoled

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164. For the Faringdon and Wayford cases see Assi 25/1/3 and 25/1/12; and for Montacute see Assi 24/43, 25/1/6, and 25/1/12.

for a year, most received much lighter treatment[165]. Cases at Hindon, Melksham, Chippenham and Bruton were brought to court in 1795 but the defendants discharged and two men convicted of riot at Devizes received only one shilling fines[166].

Crowds and the Press

Newspapers did far more than simply record or ignore disturbances. Felix Farleys claimed that it,

> scrupulously avoided entering into the particulars of the riotous assembling of the populace in various places from a conviction that such representations tend rather to spread the evil than to ally the ferment, and we shall continue to persevere in the same line of conduct till it shall be proved to us that the adoption of that of an opposite nature will be more likely to promote the public tranquility and the happiness of the people[167].

This was the paper's way of saying that there had just been a riot in Bristol; an event ignored by all the Bristol papers but revealed in them nevertheless by an insertion placed by the magistrates appealing for calm.

165. WRO A1/110/1796, Wiltshire QS January and March 1796; Bath Journal 28/7/1800 & 25/8/1800.
166. WRO A1/110/1795, Wiltshire QS, October 1795; SCRO 363/3, Somerset QS, July 1795; Salisbury Journal 14/3/1796. Other examples include small fines for 5 Warminster men in 1801: WRO A1/110/1801, Wiltshire QS, April 1801; discharges for 31 Trowbridge men in 1800: Assi 24/43, Wiltshire assize, summer 1800; and aquittals for eight Bristol men in 1801: Bonner and Middleton's Bristol Journal 11/4/1801.
167. Felix Farleys Bristol Journal, 20/9/1800.

The Salisbury Journal had taken a very similar line in 1795, declining to report the details of reported disturbances it said, 'without sufficient enquiry into their authenticity'[168]. Again, an insertion from the magistrates a week earlier had confirmed a disturbance in Salisbury market, so this was no systematic news black-out. In fact, the Journal's motives were rather more charitable than Felix Farleys'. In July, the paper had carried a stern admonishment to would-be food rioters in common with many other provincial papers and using a 'syndicated' text. Under a heading 'Reasons for not Rioting', it portrayed patient and temperate behaviour as both patriotic and logical[169] but was not heavily critical of those who ignored its advice. The following week the paper declined to comment on local disturbances because

> We are inclined to pity rather than blame those whom necessity has driven to such measures which they at the same time know to be wrong, and we are therefore much more happy in being able to administer consolation than in denouncing threats against them[170].

The Sherbourne Mercury was another paper that professed itself an opponent of rioting but displayed little horror when it actually happened. Discussing a price-fixing

168. Salisbury Journal 23/11/1795.
169. Salisbury Journal 20/7/1795. The same insertion appeared in the Bristol Gazette for example, 2/7/1795.
170. Salisbury Journal 27/7/1795.

incident in 1800, the paper began by describing the ringleader as 'a woman, not aware, it is probable, of the impropriety of her conduct'. Neither did it criticise the magistrate who dismissed her with a reprimand, despite 'some little confusion in the market'[171]. The paper had made its position plain in August. The scarcity was the 'artificial' creation of greedy farmers and regrators - against whom it recommended strong legal sanctions. The paper was 'not surprised' the poor had been rioting in such circumstances:

> We wonder not that it has been hardly possible to prevent the many thousand families who have been distressed by these oppressors from showing their indignation[172].

Felix Farleys, despite its high moral stand on press sensationalism and rioting, was quite prepared to use the threat of disorder to admonish the farmers and city Corporation. One week before the disturbance they chose not to report for fear of encouraging further disorder, the paper predicted with studied vagueness that the 'cheerfulness, patience and resignation' of the Bristol poor would not last indefinitely. Unless something was done to reduce prices in this 'alarming present period', 'Heaven knows what may be the consequence'[173]. In 1795, a similar situation occurred when crowds of colliers seized

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171. Sherbourne Mercury 15/9/1800.
172. Sherbourne Mercury 4/8/1800.
173. Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 13/9/1800.

provisions on their way to Bristol market during the same week that Felix Farleys chose to declare:

> We trust... considering the abundance of potatoes that have been grown this year, the public will see that there are no just grounds for advancing their price and will accordingly resist any such attempt[174].

The Bristol Gazette did not go so far. In May 1795 after earlier collier disturbances it maintained, 'It is certain no good can be obtained by rioting', and adopted the familiar line that 'these means cannot produce a plenty but are the most likely to make a scarcity'. Yet, like the Sherbourne Mercury, the Gazette rejected the idea that there was any genuine scarcity at present, thereby feeding the popular prejudices against producers that lay behind every 'moral economy' disturbance[175]. In the edition that appeared two days before the Bristol meat riot of 1795, the Gazette railed against the 'exorbitant' price of beef, stated its wish that the public would refuse to buy it, for 'it is generally believed that all beef is raised much beyond the present necessity', and called for the arrest of all hucksters[176].

In 1796, the Bath Herald was equally forthright in its condemnation of avaricious farmers, but offered few

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174. Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 7/11/1795.
175. Bristol Gazette 14/5/1795.
176. Bristol Gazette 4/6/1795.

crumbs of comfort to the poor who suffered under them, beyond constant assurances that prosperity was just around the corner. Having told its readers throughout April that wheat stocks were now plentiful and prices were sure to tumble soon, the Herald noted that 'assemblies' of Mendip colliers had begun 'scrutinizing the real quantity of corn on hand'. When one 'scrutinized' miller was dragged from his home by 800 colliers to be examined by a magistrate, the paper quickly repudiated 'violent measures' and predicted 'avarice and extortion will soon bring about their own punishment'[177].

The miners were not reassured however, and clashed violently with the military in Frome a week later when they attempted to regulate the price of bread[178]. The Herald condemned them, but had been at least partly responsible for their action. It was the Herald that had insisted that the 'golden days of plenty and cheapness' were being held back in mid April by farmers not bringing as much corn to market as they could afford to. In fact, prices stayed high at the region's principal grain markets until May. Reduction remained sluggish throughout the summer and the Herald resumed its attack on the farmers in June and July. Rapid reduction took place at last in August[179].

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177. Bath Herald 23/4/1796.
178. Bath Herald 29/4/1796.
179. Bath Herald 20/5/1796, 10/6/1796, 15/7/1796 & 20/8/1796.

Like most of its competitors, the Herald was less inclined to deny the reality of scarcity in 1800-01. Its attitude to crowd action went through a similar transformation. The paper was forthright in its attack upon the Bath potato crowd in May 1800:

> Is it not astonishing that anyone can be so ignorant as to suppose that such disorderly acts can reduce the price of any of the articles of life? Those very means must tend to advance them by preventing farmers and others from bringing their commodities to market.

But sure enough, and far more prematurely than in 1796, the paper finished with encouraging predictions:

> The present distresses of the poor can be but of short duration - Great arrivals of grain are daily expected[180].

Felix Farleys kept its advice hopelessly simple and optimistic. In September 1800, it published a piece condemning rioting which urged:

> Let everyone keep in his own house, which is in this happy country, his castle... Then let him keep there and no harm can come to him, and a little time, with the plans that are now pursuing, will doubtless bring all things right[181].

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180. Bath Herald 10/5/1800.
181. Felix Farleys Bristol Journal 20/9/1800.

There was clearly some correlation between the populist condemnations of farmers by newspaper editors, together with uninformed assertions that scarcity would soon be over, or recommendations to the public not to tolerate unfair prices, and the incidence of crowd activity. Journalistic populism was easy copy, and an invisible enemy of landed rural grain-hoarders was an easy target. Editorial reluctance to believe the scarcity genuine in 1795, but to accept it as a reality in 1800, mirrored wider attitudes and influenced their tolerance of crowds[182].

Scarcity and Terrorism

The final form of popular direct action to be considered in this chapter is the use of terrorist threats and attacks to influence prices. The anonymous threat does not rely upon the mobilisation of large numbers of people, but usually pre-supposes the presence of some unseen phalanx, ready to rise if the demands of the writer are not met. It is therefore closely related to crowd action. We may even call such anonymous threats the 'voice' of the crowd, for there can be no doubt that they came from those who endorsed and, where possible, took

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182. Popular hatred and suspicion of farmers was also encouraged by many broadsheet ballads. See for example, The Haunted Farmer, or the Ghost of the Granary: A Tale Applicable to the Times (Chippenham 1800). This ballad also gives tacit approval to the riot which causes the villainous farmer's demise. Such justice is only approved, of course, because legal regulation has been abandoned on government advice.

part in crowd action. It appears that a far greater number of threatening letters were sent during the second scarcity than during the first. I have found evidence of only four during the years 1795-6, but of eighteen between February 1800 and March 1801, as well as nine instances of arson and two incidents in which firearms were used[183]. There were undoubtedly many more during both periods which were never communicated to the authorities. During the second scarcity, anonymous threats and arson were used in major centres, and with apparent cross-town co-ordination, before any recorded crowd activity. The use of 'terrorism' during the 1795-6 scarcity on the other hand was very limited in comparison with crowd activity. It would seem plausible therefore that popular reliance on traditional 'legitimate' price-fixing by crowds was beginning to give way to new, less negotiable, less deferential, ways of controlling the market by 1800.

Letters found during the first scarcity generally adopt a tone regretting confrontation and are often couched in reasonable enough language. Targets are usually market-place villains. One sent to the Corporation at Salisbury for instance reminds them of their 'duty' to suppress engrossers and regrators, and threatens popular regulation otherwise but,

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183. I am counting incidents here, rather than single letters, for which the number is much higher. For example, at Bristol in February, three letters were found, and at least four at Bath in March.

> I should be sorrey to see the Distruction that Riot makes but if you will not cast the Errow on side it must and will come at all events[184].

A letter pinned to the church door at Stogursey that year also emphasised, 'I do not mean to hurt any parsion - but the Corn Gobers and the fate of them will be cruel...' The letter concludes however with unconcealed fury:

> Now my Lads is the time to swear Down with those houses and hing them rise Dam thare eyse as soon as I see you asimbel together I will apear my self with 50 brave fellows...[185].

Another 'apologetic' letter, sent to the mayor of Bristol in October by one 'Ego Amor Pax', alleged that the poor were ready to 'take up arms' but only 'to compel those extortioners to comply' and not to make revolution[186].

It is possible to detect a shift of emphasis in many letters sent during the second scarcity however. Market-place villains and weak-kneed magistrates remained targets but the King and his ministers were now added to them. Letters left at strategic points in Bristol in February were directly critical of the war, and its handling by 'Pitt and his minions'[187]. In March, during an intense spate of letter-writing and fire-raising at

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184. HO 42/34, Turner to Portland (with enclosure), 6/4/1795.
185. SCRO DD/AH bundle 59/12, anonymous note dated April 1795.
186. Ego Amor Pax to Mayor of Bristol 31/10/1795, Town Clerk's Letter Boxes, 1795 box, unnumbered bundle. The name is Latin for 'I love peace'.
187. Corporation Letter Book, Morgan to Portland 26/2/1800.

Bath, a note addressed to the mayor, Corporation, brewers, bakers and butchers of the city threatened the execution of the King unless the war was ended and the city's loaves enlarged[188]. Yet a writer from Bristol still managed to convey the threat of armed rebellion and admiration for the French without jettisoning constitutional loyalism - 'the authors of this letter is well wishers to the Crown and all the Royal Family'[189]. A hidden agenda of egalitarianism often surfaced in notes like these without overtly challenging political systems or resorting to the 'shock tactics' of republican language. John Gibbs, a farmer at Bishops Lydeard, was threatened with arson unless he supplied the markets with cheap grain, but the letter went on:

> And we will not stop thou boaster of riches at the high price of corn until we have brought thee to what thou wast upon a level with us, the poorest of the parish[190].

The threat of violence was conveyed in many of letters by a desperate, almost ranting, incoherence of language as it reached a conclusion. William Dyke of Syrencot received a short note in March 1800 which began calmly and rationally enough but underwent a powerful

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188. HO 42/49, Horton to Portland 13/3/1800. Republican rhetoric in threatening letters is discussed in chapter two. This one continued, 'As we can't make a Rick, We'll do things more Quick, As Provisions gets higher, The greater the Fire! Beware. A Stitch in time saves nine'.
189. Anon to Mayor of Bristol 6/12/1800, Town Clerk's Letter Boxes, 1801 box, loose folio 35.
190. HO 42/51, Gibbs to Portland 20/11/1800.

transformation once the writer's grievance had been stated:

> Mr Dyke, it is particularly desired by several people for you to Indevor to sink the Markets. If you do not, your house barns and stables shall be sett on Fire and your Brains be Daished out this you may Depend on you Blood thirsty starve Poor theest of Hell Flames[191].

Another farmer, John Needham of Bickham near Minehead was told that unless he lowered his prices, a 'plot' was laid 'so as his Body will be Driven in the are'[192]. Occasionally, the ritual pattern of violent threatening language followed by possible actual economic damage was broken by direct physical attacks upon unpopular individuals. This was rare for, as with the victims of crowd action, physical harm to the person was generally avoided. But two millers were ambushed and shot at with a blunderbuss as they returned form Bruton market in May 1800, and the landowner Thomas Champneys of Orchardleigh near Frome had his windows shattered one night by a blunderbuss and other shots were fired into the door of his bailiff[193].

The magistrate John Bowen was emphatic in his assurances to the Home Office that, although he had received several prior to the Bath potato riot in May 1800, 'they shall

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191. London Gazette 8-11 March 1800.
192. London Gazette 13-16/9/1800.
193. HO 42/50, Stevens to Portland 11/5/1800; London Gazette 22-25/11/1800.

not intimidate me from doing what I consider to be my duty'[194]. At the time of writing however, he was flush with the success of his dispersal of the Bath crowd. His fellow county magistrate, Francis Adams of Keynsham was less steadfast. After a spate of mocking insults against him and his family in June, he asked Portland what he should do, for such letters

> tend to bring on (me) the ridicule at least, if not the contempt, of the county, which must weaken the strands of government by deterring gentlemen from acting in the Commission of the Peace[195].

Farmers and dealers were certainly fearful of financial ruin should threats of arson be carried out. And with good reason. £1500 worth of damage was done when an arson attack on a barn at North Perrott spread to other farm buildings. A Whiteparish farmer who received anonymous threats tried to move as much of his stock as possible away from remote locations, but still lost a substantial amount when incendiaries struck[196]. The destruction by fire of Williams brewery at Bath in March 1800, caused an estimated loss of £20,000. The conflagration, which, with 'the neighbouring hills illuminated by the flames... presented a scene awfully grand and impressive'[197], struck terror into the hearts of all city traders. Anonymous letter writers in other areas taunted their

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194. HO 42/50, Bowen to King 17/5/1800.
195. HO 42/50, Adams to Portland, 2/6/1800.
196. Salisbury Journal 21/3/1796; & 17/2/1800.
197. Bath Journal 10/3/1800; Sherbourne Mercury 17/3/1800

victims with it; at Rode for instance, the regulators were 'determined to play Bath Folks'[198]. Thomas Jolliffe of Ammerdown visited the city a month after the fire and found the tradesmen 'very alarmed' and still patrolling the streets for nocturnal incendiaries. The facts of the 'Diabolical scheme' had already been embellished to include 'a train of wetted gunpowder, discovered on fire and providentially extinguished. It is suggested the intention was to have burnt down Stall Street'[199].

It was extremely difficult for the law to deal effectively with senders of anonymous threatening letters. Even if the local authorities believed they knew the identity of the sender, prosecution was difficult without an admission of guilt or corroboration by witnesses. Quarter session and assize records give no indication that anyone was successfully prosecuted for the offence in this region. I have found a single set of case notes, intended as the basis of a prosecution against a labourer of Stogursey, Joseph Brown, for sending a letter to John Acland in February 1800. Two witnesses were prepared to say they recognised the handwriting as Brown's, but there is no record of the case having been brought[200]. Appeals for witnesses were usually made through reward notices published in the local press or the London Gazette, urging accomplices to

198. Salisbury Journal 14/4/1800
199. DD/HY, Jolliffe Papers, Box 20, T S Jolliffe to Mary Ann Jolliffe, 7/4/1800.
200. DD/AH, bundle 59/12, Information of John Acland and others, February 1800.

acts of betrayal by offering them legal immunity. Despite frequently generous rewards, the failure of such measures are once again suggested by an absence of recorded prosecution. And rewards were usually only payable in cases leading to a conviction. Senders of letters did not, of course, need accomplices, so witnesses were at something of a premium. A note sent at Whiteparish, Wiltshire, ended, 'It is no use to offer no reward for I have nobody but myself. Amen'[201]. Following an incendiary attack on some wheatricks at Wedmore, Somerset in March 1800, a magistrate admitted to Portland that although a reward would be published, he did not expect anyone to come forward[202].

In October 1800, a prosecution was compiled against George Bleadon for combination and conspiracy after it was alleged he had threatened to burn down a Wiltshire mill. This case was made possible because he had not written the words but spoken them, making witness evidence more reliable. Bleadon was alleged to have said at a Calne inn,

> You have had a fire about Marlborough lately I hear. That won't be all, for they intend to burn Kellaways Mill down... within this month.

But once again the case floundered. Bleadon argued that he was simply reporting what he had heard, that he had no intention of burning the mill himself, and that he could

201. HO 42/49, Information of the Inhabitants of Whiteparish, 17/2/1800.
202. HO 42/49, Dickinson to Portland 2/4/1800.

not identify the people who had said it. He was discharged at the Quarter Session[203].

When an apparently well-organised campaign of threats and fire-raising began in the urban centres of the region in March 1800, the Home Office adopted a stock response in letters to frightened local authorities. Firstly, a reward would be offered. Secondly, magistrates should keep Volunteers and regular troops in constant readiness. Thirdly, a 'sufficient number' of Special Constables should be immediately sworn in and nightly patrols of the streets organised. And fourthly, magistrates should use 'discreet and confidential agents... to watch during the night'. This advice was followed at Bath, Bristol, Shepton Mallet and Marlborough, but still there were no prosecutions[204].

Incendiaries were punished in an exemplary manner in those rare instances that they were caught and convicted. Barsella Hallet admitted setting fire to a barn at North Perrott, Somerset in 1796 and was condemned to death for it. A suggestion that he be hanged at the scene of the crime appears to have been dropped, for he was executed at Ilchester in April[205]. But this was an isolated success for the judiciary. Most incendiaries escaped

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203. Information of William Savory 18/10/1800, Wiltshire Quarter Sessions, January 1801.
204. HO 43/11, Portland to Fooks, 13/3/1800; Portland to Mayor of Bristol 28/2/1800; Portland to Mayor of Bath 15/3/1800; Bath Herald 29/3/1800.
205. Bath Journal 14/3/1796, 4/4/1796 & 11/4/1796.

detection and punishment, leaving retribution to the impotent invective of correspondents like 'Pacificus' in the Sherbourne Mercury, who proclaimed after the destruction of a barn full of wheat at Wilton, that in future years the 'decent' poor would be distinguished from the 'violent' by 'the charity of their betters', and relief withheld to arsonists[206]. But in the absence of an identifiable culprit, and unless the entire town of Wilton was to be starved, such threats were palpable nonsense.

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Food rioting was not simply a critique of capitalism. Blockading colliers, touring weavers and domestic consumers in the market-place all lived and worked in an increasingly capitalistic environment, and gave few indications that they rejected the economic order per se. Yet the Pitt regime's promotion of the intrinsic 'egalitarianism' of the constitutional balance, with the benevolent father-figure of George III watching over the health of the nation, did not amount to a very credible laissez-faire theory of the State. Pitt's rejection of the 'moral economy' made little sense to popular constitutionalists who expected a degree of State intervention to combat the corrupt manipulation of the free-market. This, after all, was the monarch's

206. Sherbourne Mercury 17/8/1795.

theoretical role in parliamentary affairs, and it finds an echo in the large number of incidents in which crowds made their attachment to the Crown explicit. The Bath women who sang 'God Save the King' as they occupied a grain barge are an obvious example, but there was also the note stuck up in Stogursey which threatened rioting against corn jobbers by men who were 'determnd to Luse the Yoke from there necks' and ended 'God Save the King'[207]. There was also the price-agreement paper drawn up by the Kingswood colliers in 1801 which requested magistrates to sink prices before stating, 'we will always prove loyal subjects to King and Country'[208]. Tom Poole captured the spirit of popular expectations of governmental duty when he remarked of the Somerset regulators,

> It is a curious phenomenon, but we see the people doing what the government dared not do, and government permitting them to do it. Is government timid, weak or ignorant? One of the three it must be[209].

John Acland was convinced that government 'must instantly resolve on something'[210]. An anonymous letter-writer at Bristol urged the Corporation to use its influence to close down wasteful distilleries and convert 'all

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207. SCRO DD/AH. bundle 59/12, anonymous note dated April 1795. It may be possible to read this as a form of symbollic 'inversion' deliberately mimicking the language of official proclamations, but it would not make the letter any more disloyal.
208. HO 42/61, Small to Portland, 14/4/1801.
209. Thomas Poole to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 9/4/1801, quoted in H Sandford, op cit., 2, pp.42-3.
210. SCRO DD/AH. bundle 59/12, Acland to ?, 2/4/1801.

unnecessary woods' to arable land as the only way to prevent the people rising up to effect it themselves. He clearly believed such measures the duty of government for 'Both houses of parliment have been aplied to But to No purpuse sum Great men have promised But their promises is Emty promises'. It ends, 'God save the King'[211].

Radicals, some of them using contradictory republican language, were certainly active in encouraging disorder and in trying to direct public demands beyond those of simple price-regulation. Yet, as I argued in chapter two, they appear to have made little impression despite much anonymous letter-writing and bill-posting and perhaps even extensive fire-raising at Bath. They may simply have found it impossible to act very openly in many urban areas by 1800-01 because they were being too closely watched by local authorities. John Bowen knew, for example, that the Bath tailor, Robert Saxty, had been part of the crowd which appropriated potatoes at Larkhall. He also knew that Saxty had been 'a very active party' during the Bath 'Gordon' riot twenty years earlier, and that he was now 'one of the many in this place who lie by for the hour of confusion...' Bowen considered detention unnecessary however, for all such men were 'pretty well known by the mayor and city magistrates' and so unable to create much trouble[212].

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211. Bristol Corporation Letter Boxes, 1801 box, bundle 35, letter dated 6/12/1800.
212. HO 42/50, Bowen to Portland, 17/5/1800. Bowen was quite correct about Saxty. He was tried and

Unshackled market forces proved a dismal failure when magistrates at Salisbury and Bath experimented with them at the expense of the Assize of Bread and it was obvious that the voluntary nature of the Privy Council engagement in 1795 allowed too many people to ignore it altogether - particularly, once more, at that bastion of free trade, Salisbury. Professor Christie believes that private philanthropy during the scarcities constituted

> an impressive demonstration of the degree of social conscience and sense of responsibility among the propertied classes, and of their power of organisation and willingness to step in at a time of crisis[213].

Yet scarcity also exposed the inadequacy of public provision and the frail uncertainty of a system of social welfare which depended upon charitable generosity at times of acute economic hardship. This was nowhere more glaringly obvious than at Bath where a serious crisis of supply was only narrowly avoided. Popular opinion demanded a greater degree of paternal care and economic management from government. As the anonymous Bristol letter-writer put it in his missive to the Corporation, 'The Question is asked are the Labourous people to be starved this winter?' (and what was a benevolent government going to do to ensure that they did not?)[214].

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acquitted for his part in the Gordon riot at the summer assize in 1780: Bath Chronicle, 31/8/1780.

213. I R Christie, Stress and Stability (op cit.), p.123.

214. Corporation Letter Boxes, 1801 Box, bundle 35, letter dated 6/12/1800.

At Bristol, where market-forces were manipulated fairly successfully to ensure the supply of the markets in 1800-01, it was only the presence of a large pool of merchant wealth, business acumen, and a preparedness for private capital investment, combined with magisterial flexibility in setting the assize, that created a different set of conditions than elsewhere.

Conclusion

This thesis was conceived with the aim of opening out the debate about the depth, scope and cultural significance of popular politics in the 1790s. To this end I have enlarged the range of issues most commonly discussed in work of this kind and focussed my enquiry upon a previously neglected region of England. My analysis rests upon deliberately thorough empirical research employing the broadest possible range of source material, for, as I have argued, there is no other way of assessing the extent and breadth of popular political activity during the 1790s. I have avoided laying too much emphasis upon the specific reform-centred antagonisms of radicals and Reevesites and extended my terms of reference to consider responses to invasion, religious controversy, industrial disputes and provision scarcities as equally important components in the formulation of popular political experience. In examining that experience with reference to the themes of loyalism and innovation, I have suggested that any assessment of social cohesion or popular consensus must first determine as accurately as possible what that consensus was about. I have argued therefore, that the expression of national consensus, popular loyalism, is best understood as the defence or

advocacy of certain abstract values: liberty, independence, freedom, the rule of law, and the primacy of heritage (or custom and practice). This framework of concern lay broadly at the heart of radicalism, dissent, many workplace combinations, and direct action in the market-place just as much as in Reevesism. The antithesis of loyalism was not actually radicalism at all, but innovation, and it is this which lies at the root of the many apparently paradoxical ideological positions adopted at different times by some individuals and newspapers. Rather than posit radicalism <u>against</u> the forces of social cohesion, thereby ensuring its marginalisation, it may be far more useful to consider its place <u>within</u> and as a part of those forces; and scrutinise instead the vaunted hegemony of Reevesism.

I have suggested that the 'success' of Reevesism cannot realistically be calculated from head-counts of Association members, any more than a serious popular resolve to combat the French can be inferred from totting up the number of men who expressed a desire to do so in 1797-8 or 1803-4. There may have been a measure of honest patriotism at the heart of Volunteering, but popular patriotism could not always be squeezed into the restraining corsets of Pittite ideology. The social cohesion of the invasion years was qualified. An assertion that national unity against Napoleonic ambitions for the subjugation of England meant widespread support for the programmes of the Pitt ministry in 1797

for example, cannot explain the intensification of popular opposition to the war. In the 1790s, as in the 1940s, national unity did not imply the creation of a social consensus capable, as Harold Perkin has suggested, of nourishing paternalism and holding social conflict 'in check'[1]. On the contrary, social conflict continued during the war years in a multitude of guises, and even flourished amid the domestic economic tensions war brought in its wake. Some of these tensions have been discussed in the preceding chapters.

Radicalism was characterised above all else by a remarkable resilience to the hostile onslaughts of Reevesism. The 'anti-jacobin' platform of the Reeves movement tainted reform with innovation and portrayed its enthusiasts as outsiders, enthusiasts for the foreign, the alien; beyond the pale of the body-politic. That relatively small numbers of reformers did continue to meet under such adverse conditions was a confirmation of faith in the constitutional legitimacy of the radical agenda. These adverse conditions however, make an accurate assessment of the scale of active popular support for either radicalism or Reevesism extremely difficult to make. The dominance of the latter ideology amongst the elite forces that controlled local and national government and the editorial lines of most provincial newspapers has left historians with an

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1. Harold Perkin, The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780-1880 (London 1969), p.208.

abundance of unbalanced and potentially unreliable data from which to construct an assessment. There are numerous examples of this. 'Church and King' disturbances in the region were not recorded in provincial newspapers, surviving local or national government correspondence, or in legal documents. There seems no reason to assume that the three which I have identified from more obscure sources were unique in the region, but on the basis of known evidence historians are in a position neither to confirm or deny it. Similarly, evidence for the strength of radicalism remains obscured by the unsympathetic attitudes of newspaper editors (who, it will be remembered in the case of food rioting, purposefully denied the oxygen of publicity to activities they disapproved of) or the provincial conceits of the quietist elite at Bristol (and perhaps elsewhere). In the wider field, empirical work for this thesis has shown that the assessment of social and political trends from counted 'totals'; whether of arrests for sedition, industrial combinations or food riots, is extremely problematic and that all previous attempts have been flawed by underestimation.

The historiographic view of radicalism as proto-left or proto-socialist has inhibited appreciation of the common patriotism that underpinned both reform and anti-reform clubs and societies. The roots of this problem may lie in a marxian legacy of cosmopolitan 'class' politics and internationalism which has made the equation of

progressive thought with the idiosyncratic prejudices of national identity a somewhat difficult pill for left-field historians to swallow. Yet as the twentieth century political orthodoxy of 'liberal' democracies pitching themselves against 'communist' autocracies exhibits ever-increasing signs of fragmentation into small wars and nationalist re-alignment in a 'new' Europe, the experience of the 1790s may yet have something to teach modern theorists of the left. Increasingly, historians of popular movements will find the exclusion of national identity, loyalism and constitutionalism from the consideration of radical politics, untenable whether it involves physical or moral force, Spenceanism, Chartism, trades unionism or socialism. The way is now open for such an approach, particularly perhaps to the often neglected years between Trafalgar and Peterloo and certainly to the crucial period between the ending of the Napoleonic wars and the passing of the First Reform Act. In view of the complexity and scarcity of reliable surviving documentation, the usefulness of detailed local studies as the building blocks of this history remains substantially unchallenged.

Appendix A

Chronological table of sedition cases, 1791-1803

DATE OF OFFENCE	NAME	RESIDENCE	TRADE	OFFENCE	OUTCOME	SOURCES
Apr 1791	George Johnson	Chippenham	?	Publishing a seditious paper	?	Sals Jnl 11/4/91
Dec 1792	John Richardson	Salisbury	bookbinder	Proposing 'health to Tom Paine & damnation to the King and Royal family'	Discharged at assize	Sals Jnl 18/3/93
Feb 1793	Pt. Peter West	Wells	militiaman	Treasonable expressions against his majesty	400 lashes at ct. martial	B Chron 21/2/93
Mar 1793	Edward Barrington	Stoke St Gregory	yeoman	'Damn the King and Parliament, I'll go to my neck in blood, guts & garbage, turd & all to be in the forefront of the battle for a Revolution'	convicted for drunkenness in petty session	TS11/1007/4052
Mar 1793	Thomas Brimble	Saltford	farmer	Cursing the King	six months gaol & 1 hr pillory, assize	B Chron 18/4/93
Jul 1793	Messrs Robinson	London	booksellers	Supplying 'Rights of Man' to a bookshop in Norton Fitzwarren	£100 fine at assize	B Chron 2/8/93
Jan 1794	George Wilkinson	Bath	printer	'Success to the French & down with the Allies', 'The King & his ministers are villains'	20s fine & 4 mnths gaol at borough QS	Bath QS records, B Chron 15/1/94
Apr 1794	Thomas Wylde	Bath	hairdresser & servant	Wishing King's army to be 'cut to atoms'; and for the 'damned arbitrary government' to be abolished	40s fine & 6 mnths gaol at borough QS	Bath QS records, B Chron 1/5/94, TS11/1071/5056
Jun 1794	Mr Pizzio	Marlborough	labourer	Wishing the French would enter Marlborough 'and cut off all your heads'	Put in blind house. No trial details	WRO 1300/4630
Aug 1794	Thomas Meekins & Thomas Stone	London London	shoemaker labourer	Attempting to raise an army in Somerset to assist a French invasion "	Aquitted at assize "	HO 40/31

DATE OF OFFENCE	NAME	RESIDENCE	TRADE	OFFENCE	OUTCOME	SOURCES.
Aug 1794	Benjamin Bull	Bath	tailor	Distributing 'Rights of Man'	20s fine & 1 year gaol at borough QS	Bath QS records, B Chron 18/8/94, TS11/506 .
Aug 1794	Foreman William	Warminster	mason	Damning the King	6 mnths gaol at assize	Sal Jnl 9/8/1794 Assi Process Bk.
Aug 1794	Sgt Seager	Bath	dragoon	Wishing Pitt would end war & saying he didn't want to fight French	detained for 1 week for questioning	B Chron 2/9/1794 .
* Mar 1795	John Bower	Bristol	?	?	bailed pending Crown officers' advice	HO 43/6 4/3/1795 .
Sep 1795	William Lisk	Glastonbury	?	Distributing seditious handbills in a public house at Wells	committed to Wells bridewell	B Chron 10/9/95 .
Dec 1795	John Chossoll	Bristol	?	'Sundry seditious practices'	Held for three weeks for questioning	Corp Letter Box, HO 43/7 .
Apr 1796	George Rogers	Taunton	?	'Damn the King's prayer that was made for the King' & 'Damn the King & Constitution'	Aquitted at County QS	QS minutebook .
Jul 1796	James Tally	Evercreech	?	Enciting soldiers to desertion & saying 'Damn the King and Country. The King would skin my nose so I would skin the King's nose' at Shepton Mallet	1s fine & 2 mnths gaol at County QS	QS Rolls, Br Merc 1/8/96 .
Oct 1796	Thomas Batchelor	Salisbury	tailor	'The King - the King - I wish I had the bugger's head off!'	aquitted at borough QS	Sals QS records .
Mar 1797	William Bennett	Bristol	shoemaker/ smith?	Distributing seditious pamphlets at Bristol	released	Corp Letter Book .
Mar 1797	William Bennett	"	"	Selling radical newspapers and pamphlets at Bristol	aquitted at borough QS	King, 'Statement of Facts', B Chron 15/8/97.

* Bristol magistrates had detained Bower and requested Crown Officers' opinion as to whether to prosecute him. Tone of letter suggests this was for a seditious offence but it is not clearly stated (HO 43/6, John King to Rev Dr Small 4/3/1795).

DATE OF OFFENCE	NAME	RESIDENCE	TRADE	OFFENCE	OUTCOME	SOURCES
Aug 1797	William Bennett	Bristol	shoemaker/ smith?	Distributing seditious pamphlets at Bath & calling the King 'a Rogue'	detained for 2 mths but aquitted at borough QS	HO 42/41, FFBJ 12/8/97, Bath QS records
	Thomas Robins	Bath	tailor	"		
Jan 1798	James Griffin Crosse	Bath	?	Damning the King	aquitted at borough QS	Bath QS records
Apr 1798	William Cook	Bath	?	Seditious words	aquitted at borough QS	HO 43/10 Bath QS records.
Apr 1798	James Vincent	Glastonbury	?	Inciting hatred or contempt for his Majesty	released	B Chron 10/5/98
	James Layer Rchd Vincent	"	?	"	"	
May 1798	Peter Sequest	Keynsham	basketmaker & Tythingman	'I wish success to the French, God bless 'em'	1s fine & 1 mth gaol at assize	TS11/1079/5390, FFBJ 19/5/98 HO 43/10
Mar 1799	Edward Fitzgerald	Bristol	gentleman	Organising a Division of United Irishmen at Bristol	taken to London for questioning	Corp Letter Box, HO 42/46, Br Gaz 28/3/99
	Garrett Byrne	"	?	"	"	
	James Mulloy	"	Fitzgerald's steward	Implicated in the above	released	
Jan 1800	William Jenner	Bristol	clergyman	Suspicion of being a United Irishman & conducting correspondence with French	released	Corp Letter Book HO 42/49 PC1/3117 pt3
Oct 1800	?	Bath	tailor	Inciting colliers to get pikes for fighting dragoons	bailed pending govt advice	HO42/52

DATE OF OFFENCE	NAME	RESIDENCE	TRADE	OFFENCE	OUTCOME	SOURCES
Jul 1801	Isaac Dole	Bradford	carrier	'Damn the King, I care no more for him than any other man; he is a bloody villain'	?	HO 42/62, B Chron 20/7/01
Jul 1801	Ann Watkins	Bristol	publican	Unguarded expressions to militiamen	?	Corp Letter Box
Feb 1803	?	Bristol	?	seditious words and suspicion of involvement with Despard conspiracy	remanded to Bridewell	Bath Jnl 21/2/03

Appendix B

Chronological table of workplace disputes, 1792-1803

YEAR	LOCATION	OCCUPATION	CAUSE	OUTCOME	SOURCES
1790	Keynsham	Colliers	machinery	Jennies destroyed	HO 42/16 (March).
1790	Pewsey	Farm workers	wages	dispersal by militia: 2 arrests	B Chron 14/5/1790 .
1790	Shepton Mallet	Weavers		5 convictions for conspiracy: 6 mths gaol; 3 mths for 'several' others.	B Chron 18/8/1790 .
1791	Bradford & Chippenham	Weavers	apprentices	Clothiers combine to prevent weavers fining apprentices	B Chron 28/4/1791 & 5/5/1791 .
1791	Bradford	Weavers	machinery	Master shoots 3 weavers Carding machine destroyed 4 weavers acquitted	B Chron 19/5/1791 .
1791	Bristol	Brick moulders	wages	3 convicted of conspiracy & unlawful assembly 1792, 2 yr susp. sentences	FFBJ 14/4/1792 .
1791	Trowbridge	Weavers	machinery	dispersal by militia	Randall thesis p274
1792	Bristol	Tailors	wages	6 men convicted of conspiracy in Jan, but not gaoled	SFBJ 25/8/1792 FFBJ 20/10/1792
1792	Bristol	Pipe makers	wages	rise given	B Merc 16/1/1792
1792	Bristol	Tilers & Plasterers	wages	some masters comply. 2nd claim made in Dec	B Merc 27/2/1792 FFBJ 8/12/1792
1792	Bath	Shoemakers	wages	?	B Jnl 12/3/1792
1792	Bristol	Plumbers	hours	?	FFBJ 7/4/1792
1792	Bath	Staymakers	wages	?	B Herald 30/6/1792
1792	Bristol	Shoemakers	wages	rise given	SFBJ 25/8/1792
1792	Bristol	Sailcloth makers	wages/apprentices	?	Sherb Merc 23/8/1792
1792	Bristol	Bakers	wages	?	SFBJ 18/8/1792
1792	Mendip & Kingswood	Colliers	wages	rise given	FFBJ 18/8/1792 .

YEAR	LOCATION	OCCUPATION	CAUSE	OUTCOME	SOURCES
1793	Bath	Smiths	hours	shorter day given	B Chron 7/2/1793
1793	Taunton & Wellington	Wool combers	machinery	?	HO 42/25 24/6/1793
1793	Shepton Mallet	Weavers	machinery	arson at manufactory	B Herald 14/9/1793
1793	Bath	Chairmen	new conditions of service	conditions scrapped	Annual Register 1793
1794	Bristol	Shipwrights	wages	?	Soc M V minutes 1794
1794	Shepton Mallet	Weavers	machinery	arson at manufactory	Randall thesis p281
1795	Frome	Weavers	?	? ('insurrection')	Horner Papers Jan 1795
1795	Kingswood	Colliers	?	strike lasted 4 days	Victory Purdy's Pocket Book, January 1795
1795	Kingswood	Colliers	prices	dispersal by troops & rewards offered	B Gaz 14/5/1795
1795	Bath	Shoemakers	wages	?	B Journal 18/5/1795
1795	Pill	Militia	wages	dispersal by dragoons, 15 arrested	B Journal 20/7/1795
1795	Wellow	Weavers	machinery?	manufactory attacked?	B Chron 30/7/1795
1795	Westbury	Weavers	machinery	scribbling machines destroyed	Randall, B T L p84-5
1796	Bristol	Masons	wages	?	B&MBJ 23/4/1796
1796	Bath	House painters	wages	rise given	B Herald 16/7/1796
1796	Bath	Carpenters	wage-cut	several arrests for unlawful assembly; all bound over	B Herald 16/7/1796 & 21/7/1796
1796	Bristol	Tailors	piece-work	?	B Gaz 17/3 - 19/5/1796
1796	Bristol	shoemakers	wages	?	B Gaz 24/3/1796
1796	Henbury	Farm workers	wages	rewards offered for capture of leaders	B Merc 20/6/1796
1796	Melksham	Weavers	machinery	anon. threats issued, reward offered	B Merc 31/10/1796
1796	Marlborough	Weavers	machinery	Writ issued against raising machines	B Herald 23/7/1796

YEAR	LOCATION	OCCUPATION	CAUSE	OUTCOME	SOURCES
1797	Nunney & Bath	Weavers	machinery	crowd marches to destroy shear frames 1 man later charged with conspiracy	B Journal 8/1/1798 FFBJ 20/1/1798
1797	Bath	Shoemakers	wages	8 men acquitted of conspiracy at QS Jan '98	Bath QS records B Journal 11/12/1797 & 9/1/1798
1798	Farley Hungerford	Weavers	machinery?	cloth mill burnt down	B Chron 5/5/1798
1799	Bristol	Carpenters	wages	?	B Gaz 13/6/1799
1799	Bristol	Pipe makers	wages	?	B Gaz 11/7/1799
1799	Shepton Mallet	Weavers	machinery	cloth mill burnt down	Rogers, W&W p.78
1799	Winterslow	Farm workers	wages	3 men fined 1/- at assize, riot & unlawful assembly	Assi 24/43 Lent '99
1800	Pill	Pilots	wages	rise given	Minutes Soc M V 6/1800
1800	Bristol	Shipwrights	wages	1 jnyman given 3 mths & another 1 mth for combination; and ten apprentices given 1 mth for a misdemeanour	FFBJ 2/8/1800
1800	Bishopstone	Farm workers	wages	4 men convicted for riot & assault at QS; sentence unknown	QS A1/110/1801
1800	Taunton Wellington & Langport	Bargemen	wages	17 men publish apology	FFBJ 29/11/1800
1800	Bristol	Tailors	wages	?	FFBJ 27/12/1800
1801	Kingswood	Colliers	prices	dispersal by troops. 2 men arrested & released	HO 42/61 Apr 1801
1802	Bath	Tailors	wages	rise given by some masters	B Journal 26/4/1802
1802	Frome	Weavers	employment of ex-servicemen	2 men committed for combination, make apology	B Chron 4/3/1802

YEAR	LOCATION	OCCUPATION	CAUSE	OUTCOME	SOURCES
1802	Wiltshire	Weavers	machinery	Shearmens' revolt. Woollen district disturbed by arson, etc April-Nov; Thomas Helliker hanged	Numerous papers and Randall BTL ch 5
1804	Kingswood	Colliers	?	?	B Journal 6/2/1804
1804	Bath	Shoemakers	wages	rise given by some masters	Aspinal EETUs p.75-9
1805	Bath	Shoemakers	wages	?	B Chron 2/5/1805

Appendix C

i.

A note on counting crowds

No list of crowd activity can claim to be exhaustive or definitive, but I include one here to illustrate the diversity of sources which any quantitative study must consult, and to show that, however many disturbances there may have been in this region (and I have found 62), previous studies have substantially under-estimated the total. John Stevenson's discovery of 5 disturbances in the region during these years (and all in Bristol, Bath and Frome) for example, would be excusable were it not for his insistence on drawing meaningful conclusions from such incomplete research. Stevenson is critical of the 'general explanations' offered for rioting by E P Thompson and others because, he says, they presuppose food riots to have been 'a universal phenomena, which clearly they were not'. But his own research has emphatically failed to prove any such hypothesis. Thompson's comments, complains Stevenson,

> tell us nothing about why some places were almost perennially subject to disturbances, whilst others remained almost completely undisturbed[1].

Whilst there is undoubtedly some validity in investigating the relative propensity for 'riot' between communities, studies like Stevenson's, which assume quietism in many districts that were unmistakably disturbed, can contribute little to the debate.

I have included details of crowd numbers, where known, to illustrate the difficulties inherent in John Bohstedt's 'rule of 50'. In most cases, the figure is simply not recorded. I have also differentiated participants by gender but again, the sex of crowds was so rarely recorded that it has not been possible to draw any useful conclusions from the evidence. I have deliberately avoided categorising crowds as male on the strength of descriptive reports concerning 'colliers' or 'weavers'. The total of 62 disturbances itemised here could be expanded by the inclusion of 'possible' or 'expected' but unprovable riots - of which there are a great many, hinted at particularly in the troop movements recorded in the War Office papers - or actual disturbances that were only partly to do with scarcity but which, from their

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1. J Stevenson, 'Food Riots in England, 1792-1818' in R Quinault and J Stevenson (eds), Popular Protest and Public Order. Six Studies in British History 1790-1920 (London 1974), p.36 (table) and pp.66-7. For another example of the supremacy of locally detailed research over broad observation, see A Booth, 'Food Riots in the North West of England, 1790-1801', Past & Present, 77, (1977), p.89 passim.

description seemed more appropriate as inclusions in Appendix B (workplace disputes).

Roger Wells' short article on the difficulties of counting crowds is a succinct and well-argued guide to the pitfalls[2]. There are two lessons to be learned: firstly, that historians must check every possible source for disturbances, and secondly, retain a healthy scepticism about the reliability of the resulting figure. The following table includes many disturbances that are recorded in only one source and several that are ignored by all of the most likely sources. Since some disturbances are recorded only in private correspondence (as at Hilmarton in 1795, and the 'insurrection' at Frome in January of that year[3]), the possibility that many more have been lost to history would seem strong.

Sources occasionally create problems of their own. Quarter Session and Assize records may disclose that a riot has taken place, but not what it was about. In any general trawl for all popular disturbances such details may not matter, but if the intention is to count food riots during scarcity it is obviously crucial. I have assumed the Trowbridge riot mentioned in the Assize Process Book for the Summer sessions of 1800 to be the

2. R Wells, 'Counting Riots in Eighteenth Century England', Bulletin of the Society for the Study Of Labour History, 37 (Autumn 1978), pp.68-70.
3. WRO 1300/2343, Savernake Estate Papers, Ward to Aylesbury 3/7/1795; Mells Manor Muniments, T Horner to T Sheppard 15/1/1795 & T Sheppard to T Horner 17/1/1795.

known food riot of August 9th, but it cannot be verified[4]. More difficult still are legal records of unspecified rioting that cannot be matched to explanatory evidence in other sources. This is the case for instance with eight men of Keevil, Wiltshire, charged with riot and assault at the Lent assize of 1796[5]. It has not been possible to positively link the four men charged with rioting at Salisbury at the same assize with a known food riot in the city the previous November because the Salisbury magistrates claimed they had made no arrests during it. Further rioting, they promised, would indeed result in arrests being made, but the subsequent decision of the Salisbury Journal to stop reporting riots leaves historians none the wiser[6]. Two crowds from Milborne Port and Sherbourne who joined forces across the county border to release a group of prisoners in September 1800 sound suspiciously like price-fixers, but I have not felt able to include them here[7].

In other case, records suggest the presence of a crowd, however small, although no charges of riot were brought. William Wernam, transported for stealing butter from a jobber near Bishopstone in 1800, or Thomas Harding and Richard Macey, cleared of stealing bacon and cheese from a waggon near Salisbury are useful examples[8]. Others

4. Assi 24/43, Wiltshire Summer 1800.
5. Assi 24/43, Wiltshire March 1796.
6. Assi 24/43, Western Circuit Process Book, Wiltshire March 1796; Salisbury Journal 16/11/1795 & 23/11/1795.
7. SCRO QS/R 369/1, Somerset Quarter Session January 1801, information of John Longman 16/10/1800.
8. Assi 25/1/4, Wiltshire assize indictments, Lent 1801.

include John Blandford of Donhead St Mary, who assaulted and abused a miller in 1795[9] and three men and two women of South Brent who were cleared of assaulting James Kebby and forcing their way into his house in 1801[10]. None of these cases, or any like them, have been included here.

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9. Salisbury Journal 30/11/1795.
10. Assi 25/1/12, Western Circuit Misdemeanours, Lent 1801.

Appendix C

ii.

Chronological table of food-related popular disturbances, 1795-1801

DATE	LOCATION	TYPE	NUMBER	CROWD OCCUPATIONS	CROWD GENDER	MAGISTRATE RESPONSE	SOURCES
?/2/95	Burbage	Deputation	-	labourers	-	conciliatory	WRO 1300/2550
17/4/95	Hindon	price-fixing	-	-	-	Dispersal by troops. 2 men bound over and discharged at QS.	WRO QS rolls
27/4/95	Wells	price-fixing	-	led by militia	-	reported	HO42/34
2/5/95	Bruton	price-fixing	-	-	woman-led	Dispersal by troops. 1 woman discharged at Quarter Session.	WO1/1093, Courier SCRO QS rolls
5-8/5/95	Kingswood	price-fixing & blockades	'large body'	colliers	-	Dispersals by troops. 3 arrests, reward for 7 named suspects.	WO1/1083, 1092, B.Gaz, B.Merc
?/5/95	Frome	price-fixing	-	-	-	Special Constables enrolled.	B.Gaz, B.Chron Courier
12/5/95	Trowbridge	price-fixing	4-500	-	-	Troops called out; Special Constables enrolled.	WO1/1090
4-6/6/95	Bristol	price-fixing	-	led by militia? (Courier)	-	Dispersal by troops & Specials. 1 male brewery worker sentenced to death at assize (reprieved) & 2 men aquitted.	WO1/1092, Bristol QS & Assize papers, B.Merc, B.Journal, Courier, Watchman.
1/7/95	Hilmarton	blockade	-	-	-	-	WRO 1300/2343
19/7/95	Melksham	price-fixing	approx 11	-	woman-led	woman leader arrested, discharged at QS but confined as a lunatic.	WRO QS rolls
20/7/95	Standerwick & Westbury	price-fixing	-	-	-	-	Courier
21/7/95	Trowbridge, Bradford, Westbury & Warminster	touring	2000	mostly cloth workers	-	-	WASL Ms Box 205, Courier

DATE	LOCATION	TYPE	NUMBER	CROWD OCCUPATIONS	CROWD GENDER	MAGISTRATES RESPONSE	SOURCES
?/7/95	nr Shepton Mallet	-	-	colliers	-	dispersed by Yeomanry	WO1/1093
28/7/95	Somerton	blockade/ seizure	-	-	women	conciliatory. One magistrate and cmdr of Volunteers convicted for neglect of duty at Court of Kings Bench	S.Merc, B.Chron, B.Herald
31/7/95	Chippenham	price-fixing	-	-	-	1 woman discharged at QS	WRO QS rolls
3/8/95	Bath	blockade	'dreadful number'	-	mostly women	dispersal by troops, specials enrolled	B.Chron, B.Herald Gen. Evening Post
6/8/95	Devizes	price-fixing	-	-	mixed	dispersal by troops. 2 men (a weaver and a convicted at assize & fined 1s after apology. 1 woman discharged.	S.Journal, Courier
19/10/95	Keynsham	deputation	'numerous'	-	-	conciliatory, reported.	HO42/36
30-31/10/95	Trowbridge & Bradford	'fermentation over prices'	-	-	-	reported	HO42/36
9/11/95	Westbury	price-fixing	-	-	-	1 man transported and 1 man gaoled 6 months at QS	WRO QS rolls, S.Journal, Courier
9/11/95	Pewsham	price-fixing	-	-	-	1 man (carpenter) transported at QS	WRO QS rolls Courier
10/11/95	Salisbury	price-fixing	-	-	-	arrests threatened	S.Journal
10-13/11/95	Coalpit Heath	blockade/ price-fixing	-	Hatters & colliers	- -	dispersal by troops. 2 arrests	WO1/1092, FFBJ
11/11/95	Westerleigh	deputation	-	Hatters & colliers	-	conciliatory	FFBJ
?/12/95	Wilton	deputation	200	artisans and labourers	- -	conciliatory	Courier

DATE	LOCATION	TYPE	NUMBER	CROWD OCCUPATION	CROWD GENDER	MAGISTRATES RESPONSE	SOURCES
16/4/96	Bristol	supporters of condemned rioter	-	-	-	some arrests	Corporation Letter Book
20?/4/96	Timsbury	price-fixing	800	colliers	-	negotiated dispersal	BMBJ, B.Herald
20/4/96	Cridlingcott	shortweight	-	-	-	8 men arrested, case after public apology	SCRO QS rolls, B.Chron
25?/4/96	Frome	price-fixing	-	colliers	-	dispersal by troops	B.Herald, B.Chron
8?/5/97	Bristol	price-fixing	-	-	-	none	B.Gaz
16/4/1800	Frome	price-fixing constables)	20 minimum	-	-	8 men arrested (4 were	SCRO QS minute book
7/5/00	Bath	price-fixing	over 100	-	mixed	dispersal by troops & Volunteers. 1 man gaoled for 1 yr at QS; 1 man (tailor) aquitted at assize & 3 women discharged after examination	SCRO QS rolls, HO42 B.Herald, B.Journal
26/5/00	Purton	-	-	labourers	mixed	dispersal by Yeomanry	S.Journal; Morris
9/8/00	Trowbridge	price-fixing	-	mixed	mixed	25 men (12 clothworkers, 3 clothiers, 3 carpenters, shoemakers, 1 shopkeeper, 1 clockmaker, 1 yeoman, 1 tailor, 1 gentleman) and 6 women bound over and discharged at assize.	Assi 24/43, Courier B.Journal
2/9/00	Downton	price-fixing	-	-	-	3 male papermakers discharged at assize	Assi 25/1/12 S.Journal
3/9/00	Devizes	price-fixing	-	-	-	dispersal by troops, riot averted	B.Chron, Courier, Waylen
13/9/00	Montacute	price-fixing	-	-	-	4 women sentenced to 6 months hard labour at assize	Assi 25/1/12, 25/1/3, 25/1/6

DATE	LOCATION	TYPE	NUMBER	CROWD OCCUPATION	CROWD GENDER	MAGISTRATES RESPONSE	SOURCES
18-20/9/00	Bristol	price-fixing	-	-	-	dispersal by troops	FFBJ, B.Journal
13/10/00	Stowey	deputation	-	-	-	none	Holland's Journal
20/10/00	Bath	deputation	300	colliers	-	dispersal by troops and Volunteers, curfew, several arrests (inc 1 male tailor), no pros.	HO42/52 & 53, B.Chron, B.Journal B.Herald
20/10/00	Ludgershall	seizure	'large concourse'	-	women	4 women discharged at QS	WRO QS rolls
21/10/00	Farington Gurney	price-fixing	60	-	mainly women	1 woman transported, 2 women & 1 man discharged at assize	Assi 25/1/3, 25/1/12, HO42/53
24/10/00	Bath	price-fixing	-	colliers	-	dispersal by troops and Volunteers, arrests made inc. 1 male playwrite. no pros.	Courier
25/10/00	Englishcombe	seizure	8	-	women	4 women arrested	Bath Chron
29/10/00	Warmley	seizure	200	-	women	-	B.Chron, B.Herald B.Journal.
?/?/00	Wincanton	price-fixing	-	-	-	Constable ignored	Sweetman
?/2/01	Shipham	seizure	'gang'	labourers	-	-	B.Journal, B.Chron
?/2/01	Chilmark	seizure	7	-	male	-	B.Chron, BMBJ, S.Journal
5/3/01	Wayford	price-fixing	over 50	-	-	1 male labourer gaoled for 1 yr at assize	Assi 25/1/3, 25/1/12
23-5/3/01	Wellington	touring	-	-	-	reported	HO42/61, S.Mercury Courier
25-6/3/01	Taunton	touring	-	-	-	troops called, but no action	HO42/61, S.Mercury Courier
28/3/01	Bridgwater	touring	-	-	-	reported	HO42/61

DATE	LOCATION	TYPE	NUMBER	CROWD OCCUPATION	CROWD GENDER	MAGISTRATES RESPONSE	SOURCES
30/3/01	Stogursey, Stowey, Bridgwater	touring	1000	-	-	mainly conciliatory	SCRO DD/AH 59/12, S.Mercury
30/3/01	Sth Petherton	touring?	-	-	-	-	SCRO DD/AH 59/12
30/3/01	Old Cleeve	price-fixing	-	-	-	2 men hanged at assize	Assi 25/1/3, B.Chron.
30/3/01	Chard	touring	1400	mainly woollenworkers	-	-	HO42/61, S.Mercury
31/3/01	Ilminster	touring	-	mainly	-	negotiated dispersal	HO42/61, S.Mercury
4/4/01	Bristol	price-fixing	'large body'	-	mixed	dispersal by troops, curfew. 8 men (inc 3 colliers & 4 militia) aquitted at assize	BMBJ, Courier
6/4/01	Kingswood	touring	4-500	colliers	-	dispersal by troops	HO42/61, BMBJ
6-8/4/01	Kingswood & Bristol	price-fixing & seizure	-	colliers & others	-	8 or 10 warrants issued	HO42/61
7/4/01	Warminster	touring	'large'	mixed	-	dispersal by troops & constables. 5 men (2 shearmen, 1 labourer, 1 collarmaker and 1 mason convicted of misdemeanour at QS	WRO QS rolls, B.Chron, Courier
9/4/01	Kingswood/ Mangotsfield	deputation	1-3000	colliers	-	dispersal by troops	HO42/61, B.Journal S.Mercury, Courier

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